

International Education Services

Higher education trends and opportunities in Cambodia

November 2020

Contents

Contents.....	2
Executive summary.....	3
1 Introduction.....	6
1.1 Approach to research.....	6
2 Higher Education in Cambodia	8
2.1 Introduction	8
2.2 Education system and policies.....	8
2.3 International education trends.....	10
2.4 TNE activity.....	12
3 Insights from interviews and student survey	14
3.1 Policy environment.....	14
3.2 Education system dynamics and challenges	14
3.3 Student mobility trends	18
3.4 Reaching the target market.....	21
3.5 Impacts of Covid-19 on educational opportunities	23
4 Conclusions	25

Executive summary

Opportunities for UK education sector	Challenges for UK education sector
While Australia is by far the most popular destination for Cambodian students, the UK is becoming increasingly popular among the elites and is well placed to gain market share if a few key challenges are addressed.	Lack of branding and low engagement by UK universities has resulted in poor awareness about the UK’s education offer and a misperception that the UK is a prohibitively expensive study destination.
International schools in Phnom Penh are the key target market for UK universities and online platforms will enable more cost-effective engagement in the market.	As a relatively small market, Cambodia may be better managed as part of a regional portfolio and investment in the market must be carefully balanced against the likely return.
There may be some potential for UK universities with branch campuses / TNE offers in the region (e.g. in Singapore and China) to attract Cambodian students.	TNE in Cambodia is a small market with low growth potential given the overall poor quality of local universities and small pool of students who could afford the required tuition fees.
Booming demand for language programmes and associated exams services presents opportunities for the UK’s English language sector in Cambodia.	The English language teaching and testing market is dominated by the Australian Centre for Education, which enrolled 88,000 English language students in 2019.

To assess the international education opportunities for UK universities in Cambodia, the British Council conducted a study comprising extensive desk-based research, face-to-face interviews with key stakeholders in Phnom Penh and an online student survey.

Over the past two decades, Cambodia has undergone significant economic development, reaching lower middle-income status in 2015 and targeting upper middle-income status (+US\$4,000 income per capita) by 2030. While the number of Covid-19 infections in Cambodia has been relatively low, the pandemic is exerting a heavy toll on the economy which is projected to contract by 4 per cent in 2020 before recovering strongly in 2021.

Despite significant progress in recent years, Cambodia remains one of the poorest countries in Asia and huge developmental challenges remain. Cambodia’s higher education (HE) system faces serious challenges, including poor quality of local higher education institutions (HEIs), low proportion of teaching faculty with PhDs, low research capacity and a shortage of Science, Technology, Engineering & Maths (STEM) and Technical and Vocational Education & Training (TVET) subjects and graduates.

While Cambodia only sent 200 students to the UK in 2018/19, this increased from 150 the previous year and overall outbound mobility is on an upward trend - though Australia has thus far captured most of the growth in mobility to the major English-speaking destinations.

UK universities do not have a TNE presence in Cambodia, however, Malaysia's Limkokwing University has a branch campus there since 2007 and private university the American University of Phnom Penh (AUPP) has been delivering US accredited degrees since 2016.

While Cambodia has not produced an international education strategy, both the Education 2030 Roadmap and the Education Strategic Plan 2019-2023 include goals relating to internationalisation of the HE system, with a focus on developing academic and student mobility partnerships in the ASEAN region. Cambodia presents itself as open to prospective international investors and partners, and foreign universities looking to establish a presence in the country will face few regulatory barriers.

There has been a surge in the number of international secondary schools in Phnom Penh in recent years, which typically offer an international IB or A-level curriculum. Cambodia is also home to a thriving English language teaching and IELTS testing market, dominated by the Australian Centre for Education (ACE) – a subsidiary of IDP.

The profile of students considering studying in the UK are drawn from the wealthiest segment of society and are reportedly becoming increasingly interested in the UK, which is seen as a prestigious study destination. However, the UK faces several key challenges in Cambodia:

- Lack of branding and information has resulted in poor awareness about the UK's education offer, which means that few Cambodian students are likely to know about the UK's Graduate Route.
- Low engagement by UK universities, certainly as compared with frequent visits from Australian, US and Chinese universities.
- A widespread misperception among Cambodians that the UK is a more expensive study destination than Australia, when in fact the opposite is the case.

Business and Management subjects remain the most popular among prospective international students, however, subject areas seeing growth in demand include Medicine, Computer Science, Hospitality and Design Studies.

According to interview and survey feedback, parents are the key decision makers in relation to country of study, though students have more freedom to select individual institutions.

Key sources of information for prospective international students in Cambodia include university websites, school counsellors / teachers and agents. The main social media platforms used by students in Cambodia are Instagram, YouTube and Facebook - each platform frequently used by over 75 per cent of respondents to a British Council student survey.

Cambodia adopted a relatively strict approach in seeking to contain the Covid-19 pandemic and while existing immigration restrictions remain in place, visits by UK university staff to Cambodia are probably not practical. However, the trend towards online events - which has been accelerated by the global pandemic - could ultimately make the Cambodian market more accessible for UK universities.

The relatively severe immigration restrictions imposed on international students by Australia and New Zealand for much of 2020 have provided an imperative for Cambodian students to learn more about alternative study destinations, which stands to benefit the UK.

Cambodian students surveyed were broadly split between whether they would, or would not, cancel / delay their study abroad plan for next year if the Covid-19 pandemic has not ended by then, with concerns around their health and safety predominating. Similarly, students were about evenly split about whether they would study the Autumn 2021 semester fully online versus cancelling / delaying their study abroad plans, possibly due to Cambodia's limited experience with this mode of delivery.

While Cambodia is one of the smallest Southeast Asian student recruitment markets, the UK is well placed to gain market share and potentially overtake the US as the second most popular English-speaking study destination by addressing a few key challenges.

There is a need to develop the UK's education brand in Cambodia in a coordinated manner. This includes greater dissemination of information about the UK's unique offer and addressing misperceptions about the cost of study in the UK. Greater awareness about the UK's Graduate Route and the benefits of a one-year master's degree will also boost interest in the UK.

Greater provision of, and participation in, recruitment events (mainly online) and school visits by UK institutions will drive greater mobility to the UK. However, the cost of such engagement must be carefully balanced against the realistic recruitment potential from such a small market. Cambodia may be best approached as part of a wider Southeast Asia recruitment portfolio, managed in parallel with other larger markets within the region and visited when the opportunity arises. For example, a flight to Phnom Penh from Bangkok takes just 1hr 15mins or from Hanoi takes 1hr 45mins.

Strong growth in the number of international schools in Cambodia bodes well for demand for study abroad. The main target market for UK universities is the upper-tier international schools in Phnom Penh and September to November is considered the best time of year to visit schools and run events. UK universities are advised to build relationships with school counsellors in these institutions - including inviting them to visit the UK when travel restrictions ease – and to ensure they have a Cambodian page on their website.

Transnational Education (TNE) opportunities for UK universities in Cambodia appear limited for the present. Cambodian universities have basic concerns relating to a chronic shortage of PhD trained faculty and a pressing need to raise teaching standards and address STEM skills gaps. Therefore, it may be too early for collaborative forms of TNE to develop; partnerships centred around knowledge transfer and capacity development appear more appropriate at this stage, such as those supported by the World Bank.

The high fees (\$9,000 per year) charged by AUPP Penh for its US accredited TNE programmes appears to be addressing a relatively niche demand. In general, where students can afford it, study abroad is the preferred option. And while the only international branch campus in Cambodia – Malaysia's Limkokwing University – attracts a few hundred students, its tuition fees (\$2,200 per year) are arguably below that required by a UK campus to operate sustainably, particularly given the investment in fly-in faculty that would be required. However, there appears to be some opportunity for UK university branch campuses in the region to target Cambodian students, with Singapore and China increasingly popular study destinations.

1 Introduction

The British Council conducts market scoping exercises across a range of countries on a periodic basis. These reports are used by UK education institutions and policy makers to understand trends, developments and opportunities in different markets. This is our first such report on Cambodia.

While Cambodia only sent 200 students to the UK in 2018/19, this increased from 150 the previous year and overall outbound mobility is on an upward trend - though Australia has thus far captured most of the growth in mobility to the major English-speaking destinations. UK universities do not have a TNE presence in Cambodia, however, Malaysia's Limkokwing University has a campus there since 2007 and the American University of Phnom Penh has been delivering US accredited degrees since 2016. After two decades of robust economic growth, with recent education policy initiatives placing a greater emphasis on internationalisation, and student mobility trends going in the right direction, it is timely to review Cambodia's international education landscape.

1.1 Approach to research

A programme of desk-based research, interviews with relevant stakeholders in Phnom Penh and an online student survey was undertaken to deliver this report.

Desk research

Desk research was conducted to assess the profile, scale and growth trajectory of Cambodia's higher education system, including the major challenges it faces. Recent trends and development in relation to international student mobility and TNE activity were also analysed. Key sources of information include the Cambodian Ministry of Education, the World Bank, UNESCO and various national data sources.

Interviews

Given the limited availability of domestically produced information and data about Cambodia's education system, a programme of interviews with key stakeholders in Phnom Penh was a central component of the research. The following groups were interviewed during face-to-face meetings at their premises in Phnom Penh in September 2019 (except for two Cambodian universities who were interviewed via telephone in October 2019).

- **Cambodian government agencies:** Accreditation Committee of Cambodia, and Directorate General of Higher Education in Cambodia.
- **Cambodian HEIs:** BEILTE International University, National University of Management, Royal University of Phnom Penh, Singapore Cambodia International Academy. Telephone interviews were conducted with Panasastra University and Royal University of Law and Economics.

- **International School in Cambodia:** International School of Phnom Penh and Northbridge International School Cambodia, both located on the outskirts of Phnom Penh.
- **Recruitment agents:** IDP and Springboard

Student focus group and online survey

Springboard facilitated an in-person focus group in September 2019 in Phnom Penh with seven recent secondary school graduates planning to study abroad.

Given that the production of this British Council report was delayed due to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, we sought to update our understanding of students' priorities and concerns by administering an online survey in October 2020 to prospective international students, receiving a total of 83 valid responses. While care should be taken in drawing firm conclusions from such a small sample, the responses were sourced from institutions representing the profile of students most likely to study in the UK.

The bulk of these respondents (85 per cent) was drawn from international schools in Phnom Penh, and thus represent prospective undergraduate international students. The balance was drawn from Cambodian universities and Australian universities / pathway provider, representing prospective postgraduate international students.¹

Collaboration with UK government agencies

In addition to the desk research and interviews, we liaised with our UK government colleagues operating on the ground in Cambodia: British Embassy, British Chamber of Commerce and Department of Trade and Industry. Our counterparts in these agencies provided invaluable insights, local knowledge and contact recommendations which proved instrumental in delivering this report.

¹ Responses were widely diffused across 15 international schools, 4 Cambodian universities and 3 Australian universities / pathway providers.

2 Higher Education in Cambodia

2.1 Introduction

Over the past two decades, Cambodia has undergone significant economic development, reaching lower middle-income status in 2015 and targeting upper middle-income status (+US\$4,000 income per capita) by 2030. Driven by garment exports and tourism services, Cambodia's economy sustained an average growth rate of 8 per cent between 1998 and 2019, one of the fastest-growing economies in the world. Textiles account for two thirds of exports and about one third of tourists come from China. However, agricultural activities remain the main source of income for the high proportion of Cambodians living in the countryside.

According to the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the percentage of the population living in poverty decreased from 48 per cent in 2007 to 14 per cent in 2016. While the number of Covid-19 infections in Cambodia has been relatively low, the pandemic is exerting a large toll on the economy, which is projected by ADB to contract by 4 per cent in 2020 before recovering strongly in 2021 with growth of 5.9 per cent.

Despite significant progress achieved in recent years, Cambodia remains one of the poorest countries in Asia and huge developmental challenges remain. Key reforms are needed for Cambodia to maintain economic growth including a critical need to address the lack of a skilled workforce and build a higher quality education system. Cambodia has a population of 16 million and over half are under the age of 25. The Cambodian Government works with bilateral and multilateral donors, including the ADB, the World Bank and IMF, to tackle the country's many structural issues and over 20 per cent of the government budget came from foreign donor assistance in 2018.

Currently, Cambodia's foreign policy focuses on maintaining friendly borders with its neighbours (including Thailand and Vietnam), as well as integrating itself into regional (ASEAN) and global (WTO) trading systems. China has become Cambodia's main economic influencer, foreign investor, trading partner, donor and creditor. Cambodia has been a major beneficiary of China's Belt and Road Initiative, launched in 2013, which has resulted in bilateral cooperation in physical infrastructure and connectivity development projects such as the Sihanoukville Special Economic Zone on the coast (home to Cambodia's only deep water port) and a 190 kilometre expressway from Sihanoukville to Phnom Penh, currently under construction and due to complete in 2023.

2.2 Education system and policies

Cambodia's higher education system consists of a royal academy, universities and technical institutes offering associate, bachelor, master and PhD degrees. The number of higher education institutions (HEIs) increased from eight in 1997 - when private HEIs were first

permitted - to 125 in 2018 (48 public and 77 private). Between 2014 and 2018 alone, fifteen new HEIs were established.²

The universities in Cambodia operate under the purview of 16 different government ministries/agencies, making a single list difficult to source. The Accreditation Commission of Cambodia lists 40 accredited universities on its website, mainly private institutions.³

Tertiary level enrolment stood at about 211,000 in 2018 - 60 per cent enrolled in private HEIs - and is targeted to rise significantly to 307,000 by 2023.⁴ The gross tertiary enrolment rate of 18-22 years old was 12 per cent in 2018 and is targeted to increase to 16 per cent by 2023.

Two major education policy initiatives were launched in 2019.

1. Education Strategic Plan 2019-2023

The Education Strategic Plan 2019-2023 was published in June 2019 and includes a strategic priority to improve capacity in teaching, learning and research through the development of HE partnership programmes by:

- Participating in the ASEAN International Mobility Students (AIMS) Programme.
- Establishing graduate programmes to be internationally accredited through collaboration with partner HEIs at home and abroad
- Developing research projects in collaboration with industrial partners and/or partner HEIs at home and abroad.

2. Education 2030 Roadmap

The Education 2030 Roadmap was published in February 2019 and includes a goal relating to promoting internationalisation of HE in order to strengthen the overall quality, competitiveness and innovative capacity of the HE system by:

- Promoting in-bound and out-bound student and faculty mobility and exchange, especially with HEIs in the ASEAN region.
- Designing and launching joint degree programmes, twinning arrangements and credit transfer arrangements with foreign universities, especially within the ASEAN and Asia-Pacific region.

World Bank Higher Education Improvement Project

In 2018 the World Bank approved a \$90 million non-interest-bearing loan for the Cambodian government to improve the quality and relevance of HE and research at targeted HEIs and to improve governance in the sector.⁵ The World Bank noted that a key challenge for Cambodia is

² Education Strategic Plan 2019-2023

³ Accreditation Council of Cambodia

<https://web.archive.org/web/20071006124005/http://www.acc.gov.kh/ACC.gov.kh/institutions.htm>

⁴ Education Strategic Plan 2019-2023, page 83

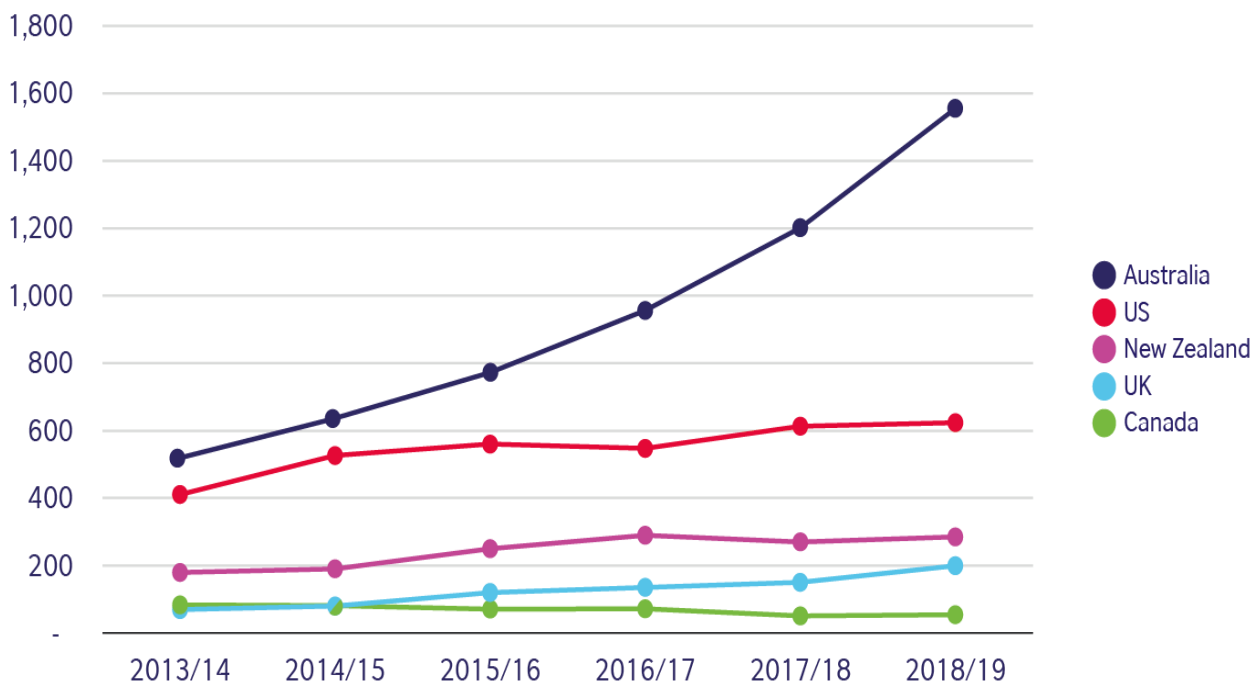
⁵ The project will support activities in five targeted public HEIs, relevant departments in MoEYS, and selected private HEIs. The public HEIs are the Institute of Technology Cambodia (ITC), the Royal University of Agriculture (RUA), the Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP) the Svay Rieng University (SRU) and University of Battambang (UBB). The private HEIs to be competitively selected through a call for proposals.

addressing the shortages of STEM graduates produced by its universities, and that the current environment is marked by a low ratio of PhD holders among HEI lecturers, and minimal research opportunities for professors and students.⁶

2.3 International education trends

Cambodia does not produce data on outbound (or inbound) student mobility. However, it is apparent from data produced by UNESCO and the major English-speaking destination countries that Cambodian outbound mobility is rising, though from a low base.

Figure 1 – Cambodian HE students in the major English-speaking destinations



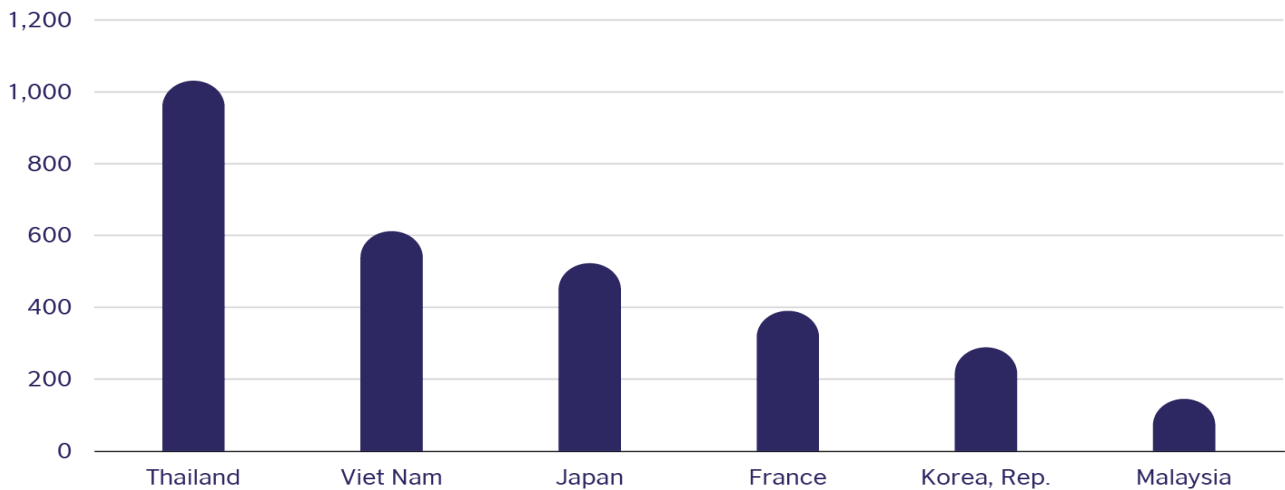
Source: Australia (Austrade), US (IIE), New Zealand (Education Counts), UK (HESA), Canada (Statcan)

Australia and the US are the leading study destinations for Cambodian students. From a similar position in 2014/15, Australia now receives over twice as many Cambodian students as the US.

Of the 200 Cambodian students in the UK in the 2018/19 academic year, 52 per cent were studying at undergraduate level and 48 per cent at postgraduate level. Business Studies and Management Studies were the most popular subject areas.

⁶ World Bank, Project Appraisal Document, 5 April 2018.

Figure 2: Cambodian HE students in non-English speaking destinations, 2018/19



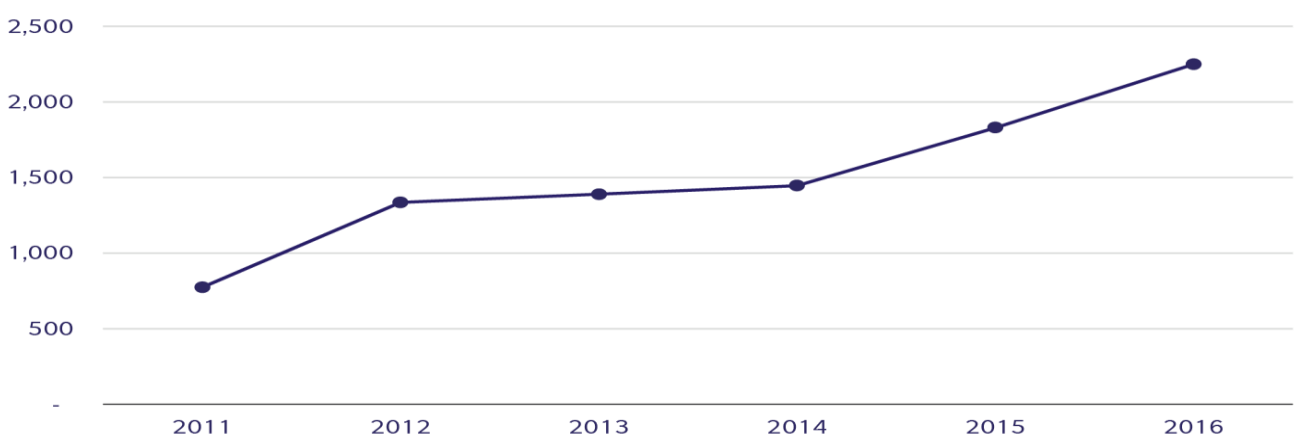
Source: UNESCO

Figure 2 presents UNESCO data on the number of Cambodian students in non-English speaking destinations for 2018/19 (or most recent year).

Availability of scholarship funding and tuition fee waivers is an important driver of mobility to the non-English speaking destinations. For example, mobility to Thailand is supported by scholarship available via the Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Scholarship schemes as well as scholarships provided by individual Thai universities.⁷

UNESCO does not report data on international student mobility to China or Singapore, both of which receive a significant number of Cambodian students. Figure 3 presents data from China’s Ministry of Education on inbound students from Cambodia, up to 2016. (Since 2017, China only provides a breakdown for its top 15 source markets, of which Cambodia is not one.)

Figure 3: Cambodian HE students in China



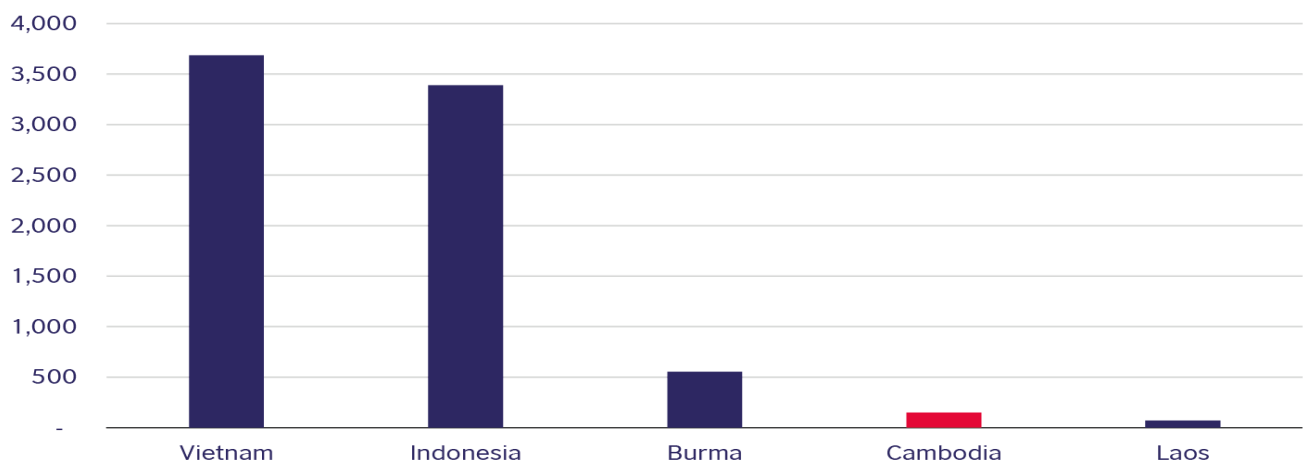
Source: Chinese Ministry of Education

⁷ Mahasarakham University Thailand [Cambodian students under her royal highness princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn scholarship](#)

China’s MoE data includes exchange students and students on short-term programmes, a broader measure of mobility than presented in Figures 1 and 2. Figure 3 shows that Cambodian mobility to China increased from 775 in 2011 to 2,250 in 2016, a trend that likely continued in more recent years. In 2017 the Chinese government awarded 181 scholarships for Cambodian students to pursue higher education in China; in 2019 the figure was 185.⁸

The Ministry of Education in Singapore does not report data on inbound international students by country of origin. There is no comprehensive source of data on Cambodian students in Singapore. However, feedback from interviews (discussed in the following chapter) suggest that Singapore is a reasonably popular study destination for Cambodian students.

Figure 4: Student mobility to the UK from selected South East Asian countries, 2018/19



Source: HESA

Figure 4 places mobility from Cambodia to the UK in the context of mobility from other countries in the region and shows that Cambodia is a relatively small market for the UK.

2.4 TNE activity

TNE is limited in scale in Cambodia and UK universities are not present in the market. The extent of TNE activity is summarised as follows.

- Limkokwing University Phnom Penh⁹

Malaysia’s Limkokwing University of Creative Technologies opened a branch campus in Phnom Penh in 2007 and delivers undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes across a broad range of creative technology areas, including: Animation, Multimedia, Digital Film and Television, Event Management, Fashion and Retailing, Industrial Design, Communications, Tourism Management, Interior Architecture, Business, Accounting, Marketing, Computer Science and Software Engineering.

⁸ EduYouth China http://edu.youth.cn/jyzz/jyxw/201708/t20170816_10522123.htm and Xinmin China <http://newsxmwb.xinmin.cn/qiaoliang/2019/08/16/31571827.html>

⁹ Limkokwing University Phnom Penh www.limkokwing.net/cambodia/

- American University of Phnom Penh¹⁰

The American University of Phnom Penh (AUPP) is a private Cambodian university based in Phnom Penh providing internationally recognised dual degree programmes in partnership with the University of Arizona and Fort Hays State University in the US. Students earn dual degree bachelor's and master's degrees provided by US professors on location in Cambodia. Dual degrees are offered in: Business Administration, Law, Civil Engineering, Interior Design, IT Management/Computer Science, Business Administration and Tourism and Hospitality Management. AUPP welcomed its first class in 2013 and introduced the dual degree programme model in 2016.

- Singapore Cambodia International Academy¹¹

The Singapore Cambodia International Academy (SCIA) is a member of the Singapore Institute of Management (SIM) Group. SCIA is the first recognised teaching centre of the University of London (UoL) in Cambodia and started offering the UoL International Foundation Programme in 2019. The programme is aimed at students with a Cambodian secondary education but without the GCE 'A' level qualification or its equivalent. The foundation programme is accepted for undergraduate entry at SIM Global Education in Singapore, as well as leading UK universities.

- Dual degrees offered in partnership with Cambodian Universities

The Royal University of Law and Economics offers eight dual degrees with universities in France, Belgium and Japan in areas of law and economics at undergraduate and postgraduate level. The National University of Management offers a dual degree with ICM Business School in France. Otherwise, there are about a handful of dual degree on offer in Cambodia.

¹⁰ American University of Phnom Penh www.aupp.edu.kh/dual-degree-programs/

¹¹ Singapore Cambodia International Academy www.limkokwing.net/cambodia/about/campus

3 Insights from interviews and student survey

A summary of the insights provided from the interviews conducted with Cambodian government agencies, education institutions, recruitment agents, the focus group conducted with Cambodian students and the online student survey are discussed in this chapter.

3.1 Policy environment

While Cambodia has not produced an international education strategy, both the Education 2030 Roadmap and the Education Strategic Plan 2019-2023 include goals relating to internationalisation of the HE system, with a focus on developing academic and student mobility partnerships in the ASEAN region.

Cambodia presents itself as open to all prospective international investors and partners, and foreign universities looking to establish a presence in the country will face few regulatory barriers.¹² International universities wishing to establish in Cambodia must follow the same procedures as domestic private universities, which involves registering as a company with the Ministry of Education (MoE) and applying for an education licence. Cambodian universities do not require approval from the MoE to partner with foreign universities, they are simply obliged to inform the ministry.¹³ ACC currently accredits institutions only, though has plans to accredit programmes. ACC reportedly maintains a register of approved institutions; however, the register is not publicly available.

The main international initiatives driving internationalisation of the Cambodian HE system include the ASEAN International Mobility for Students (AIMS) framework - extended to ASEAN+ to include Japan and South Korea - and the EU SHARE and Erasmus+ projects which support student and staff mobility and fund research and innovations centres in Cambodia.

The World Bank's \$90m Higher Education Institutions Capacity Improvement Project has supported partnerships between Cambodian HEIs and HEIs in Australia, France, Belgium, Japan, Thailand and the Philippines – though, so far, none in the UK. The Asian Development Bank is active at the upper secondary education level and at technical, vocational education and training (TVET) level in Cambodia.

3.2 Education system dynamics and challenges

Growth in international schools

There has been a surge in the number of international secondary schools in Phnom Penh in recent years, which typically offer an international IB or A-level curriculum. The top international

¹² The Singapore Cambodia International Academy highlighted the favourable regulatory environment (specifically non restriction on foreign ownership) and straight forward application process (less than six months) as key factors in establishing a campus in Cambodia instead of Indonesia. Interview conducted in September 2019.

¹³ The Cambodian Education Minister attended the World Education Forum in London in January 2019 and called for more university partnerships between Cambodia and the UK.

schools charge as much as \$20,000 per year, the mid-tier charge about \$8,000-\$10,000 per year. About 90 per cent of graduates from these schools go abroad for tertiary level study. The growth in demand for private secondary level education is attributed to rising income levels, alongside perceptions of poor teaching standards and pervasiveness of corruption in the public system. In response, the Cambodian Ministry of Education has piloted 20 'new generation schools' which receive additional funding for IT, teaching equipment and better trained teachers.

Booming English language sector

Cambodia is home to a thriving English language teaching and IELTS testing market, dominated by the Australian Centre for Education (ACE) – a subsidiary of IDP. ACE operates five campuses (four in Phnom Penh and one in Siem Riep) and enrolled 88,000 English language students in 2019. Cambodia is a 90 per cent IELTS market, a share that continues to increase. The popular CamTESOL professional development conference is organised by IDP Education in conjunction with local ELT institutions with an average audience of 1,700 researchers and teachers of English attending annually from over 30 countries. The British Council's nominated IELTS testing agent in Cambodia is Springboard, based in Phnom Penh, a relatively small operator with a good reputation.

The English and French languages are on the Cambodian primary and secondary school curricula. Few students study French and it is no longer widely spoken in Cambodia. A shortage of teachers means that English is rarely taught from grade 1 to 3 (age 6 to 8 years). From grade 4 to 6 the curriculum recommends 2 x 45-minute English language sessions per week; and from Grades 7 to 12 it recommends 4 x 50-minute sessions per week. English is generally considered by interviewees as good and improving in Phnom Penh. Chinese language is also gaining in popularity, though English is expected to remain the principal international language for business and education.

Many Cambodian universities teach exclusively in Khmer language which is considered a challenge for internationalisation of the HE system. However, several public universities deliver some of their programmes in English (e.g. The Royal University of Phnom Penh) and a few private universities deliver all their programmes in English (e.g. Pannasastra University and Paragon International University). The necessity of adapting programmes delivered in English language to the local context is considered critically important by the Cambodian Ministry of Education.

TNE a small market with low growth potential

While TNE is a minority pursuit in Cambodia, Limkokwing's international branch campus and AUPP (a private university offering US degrees) are relatively high-profile examples. During a focus group discussion with recent graduates of secondary schools in Phnom Penh, AUPP was considered the most prestigious and high-quality institution in Cambodia; whereas some negative sentiment was expressed about the perceived quality of the teaching and learning experience at Limkokwing.

Interviews with the Cambodian HEIs suggest that collaborative forms of TNE are not common. A few examples were provided of 2+2 mobility arrangements, primarily with universities in Europe under the Erasmus+ programme. According to the Royal University of Law and

Economics (RULE), in all of Cambodia there are about 10-12 dual degrees and RULE delivers eight of them. These include collaborations with universities in Brussels and Paris whereby faculty and legal experts fly to Cambodia for two-week teaching blocks. The National University of Management has a dual degree with ICM Business School in France that developed from a faculty relationship. Several of the HEI interviewees were unclear about what TNE meant, in some cases confusing it with the Erasmus+ programme. The Royal University of Phnom Penh is among the most reputable of Cambodia's public HEIs and reported having no TNE programmes.

The general consensus from the interviews is that the prospective market for TNE in Cambodia is small and has low growth potential as few students can afford the tuition fees associated with TNE.

AUPP is by far the most expensive HEI in Cambodia, charging \$9,000 per year for its four-year dual degree bachelor programmes and \$6,000 per year for its own four-year degrees. Data are not available on the number of students enrolled on AUPP's dual degree programmes, though feedback from interviews suggest that take-up is low.

Limkokwing charges \$2,200 per year for its bachelor programmes, though discounts of 30 per cent are available for the first 200 students to register for first year, reducing to 20 per cent discount for the following three years. While enrolment data are not available, the scale of the operation and the 2019 graduation ceremony would appear consistent with the Phnom Penh campus having several hundred students enrolled.

Annual tuition fees for bachelor's degree programmes at leading local private universities typically range from \$1,000 to \$3,000 per year (including registration fee), whereas fees at public universities are typically well below \$1,000 per year.

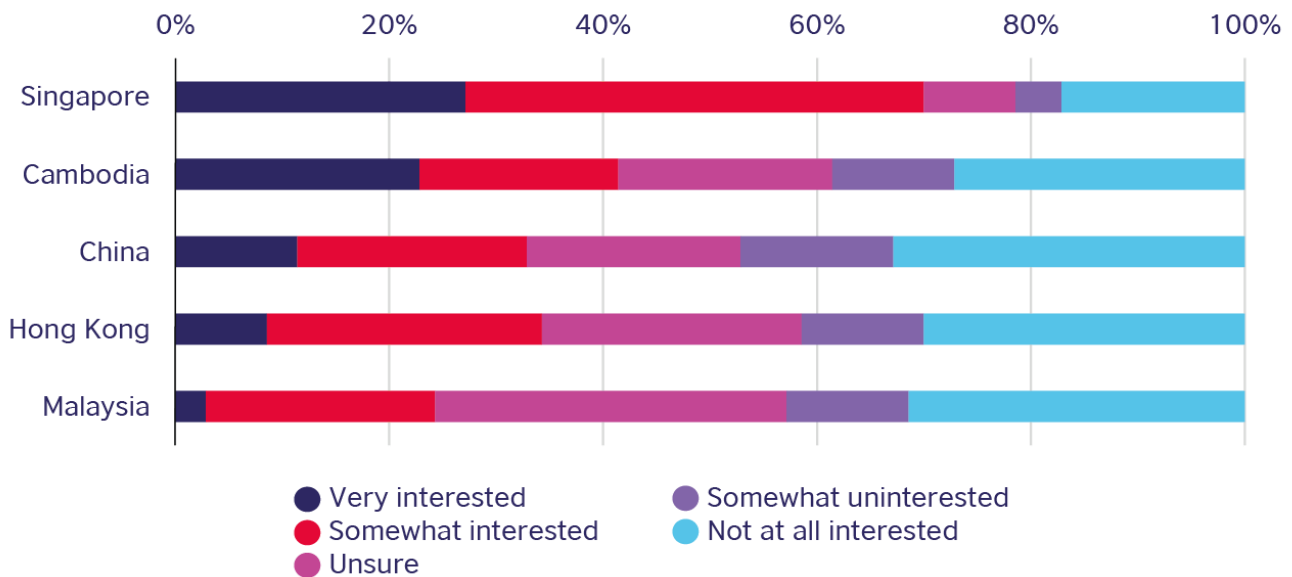
Mobility arrangements such as 2+1 are considered as challenging as most students can't afford to spend a year abroad, even within the region. The relatively poor quality of the Cambodian universities by international standards means they are not well prepared to engage in collaborative forms of TNE such as joint and dual degrees. For now, capacity development assistance from foreign partners is a higher priority. Lack of recognition of Cambodian education qualifications internationally is also seen as undermining the potential to develop TNE partnerships.

In addition, a scarcity of adequately qualified local academics would make it difficult to ensure that teaching quality and student supports meet the standards expected from a UK programme. Therefore, foreign institutions setting up in Cambodia could face some reputational risk, unless they invest significantly in flying faculty – specifically, faculty with experience of TNE. Balancing the costs with the likely return on investment, Cambodia is probably not yet a market that is ready for active development of TNE.

However, feedback from the student survey, summarised in figure 5, shows that 23 per cent of students reported being 'very interested' in a branch campus option in Cambodia and an additional 19 per cent were 'somewhat interested' in this option (a far more enthusiastic response than received during the focus group discussion). Interestingly, students were more interested in a branch campus option in Singapore, with 70 per cent either 'very interested' or

‘somewhat interested’ in this option. There was less interest expressed in branch campus options in China, Hong Kong or Malaysia - though a relatively large proportion of respondents were ‘unsure’ about studying at a branch campus in Malaysia.

Figure 5: Student survey. “Interest in studying at an International Branch Campus of a foreign university located in the following countries / administrative regions?”



Survey data based on 70 responses.

Challenges facing Cambodia’s higher education system

Cambodia’s HE system is facing the following key challenges:

- Poor quality of local HEIs

The quality of teaching and learning at Cambodian HEIs is generally accepted as being poor by international and regional standards. Rote learning predominates and the best Cambodian universities don’t feature in any of the global university rankings.

- The low proportion of teaching faculty with PhDs

An estimated 12 per cent of faculty have PhDs in Cambodian universities, considered an acute problem by government and the sector.¹⁴ Cambodia has three PhD training colleges which reportedly don’t function properly and PhD faculty in Cambodia have almost exclusively been trained abroad, typically in Australia, France, Japan and the US.

- Low research capacity

Cambodian universities rely principally on part-time faculty, who typically have a second job in a government department or private company as teaching and research is not sufficiently well paid to make it a full-time job. Similarly, most PhD candidates can only commit to part-time study, meaning it takes an average of 6-8 years to complete a PhD in Cambodia. The research

¹⁴ Interview with The Royal University of Law and Economics

capacity of universities is undermined by reliance on part-time faculty, part-time PhD students, as well as lack of government funding for research.

- Shortage of STEM and TVET subjects

There is an urgent need to address skills gaps and mismatches in Cambodia, where Science, Technology and Engineering graduates are needed to support China's BRI infrastructure projects. There is also a lack of understanding and definition of what constitutes vocational education versus university education such that students are reluctant to study diplomas as they don't understand them.

- High incidence of corruption

Corruption relating to exam results from public secondary schools and awarding of university places is considered as endemic. Efforts by the Cambodian minister for education to reform the secondary level examination system and introduce a new governance system are reportedly facing stiff resistance and push-back from the sector.

3.3 Student mobility trends

Study abroad is yielding favourable outcomes for Cambodian students on their return home and labour market opportunities in Phnom Penh (prior to the onset of Covid-19) were reported as excellent. Employers value the learning content and knowledge derived from study abroad, with soft skills and English language skills in especially big demand.

According to the interviewees, Australia is the favoured study destination for Cambodian students for several reasons:

- Australia's IDP has a strong presence in Cambodia, actively recruiting students to study in Australia and supporting Australian universities to engage with prospective students in Cambodia via events and exhibitions. In addition, the Australian Centre for Education (ACE) dominates the English language teaching and examinations market in Cambodia.
- Regional proximity and strong family ties support mobility to Australia. Thousands of Cambodians availed of Australia's Special Humanitarian Programme and quota-based Special Assistance Visa introduced in the early 1990's. The suburbs of Springvale in Melbourne and Fairfield in Sydney have large ethnic Cambodian populations.
- Australia's favourable post-study work environment including two-year post study work visa (three years outside Sydney and Melbourne) and availability of graduate level jobs. In addition, Australia offers 50 scholarships per year, compared with 18 Chevening scholarships awarded by the UK in 2019/20.
- Australia is considered a safe country with a high-quality education system. Australian education programmes are more modularized and Australian universities adopt a more flexible approach to entrance criteria and course structures.

Parents have reportedly become less inclined towards the US – which may relate to tightening visa policy in the US and anti-immigration rhetoric from the Whitehouse. At one of the international schools interviewed, the UK has overtaken the US as the main study destination. However, according to IDP, demand for study in the US remains buoyant. Many Cambodian students in the US initially enrol in community colleges (where tuition fees range from \$3,000 to \$5,000 per year) and subsequently transfer to a university.

While growth in mobility to China is supported by scholarships - generally to study Chinese language - on offer to Cambodian students and government officials - the improving standards of Chinese universities is seen as increasingly attractive for Cambodian students. Chinese universities have also become more engaged in Cambodia in recent years by more frequently visiting Cambodian education institutions.

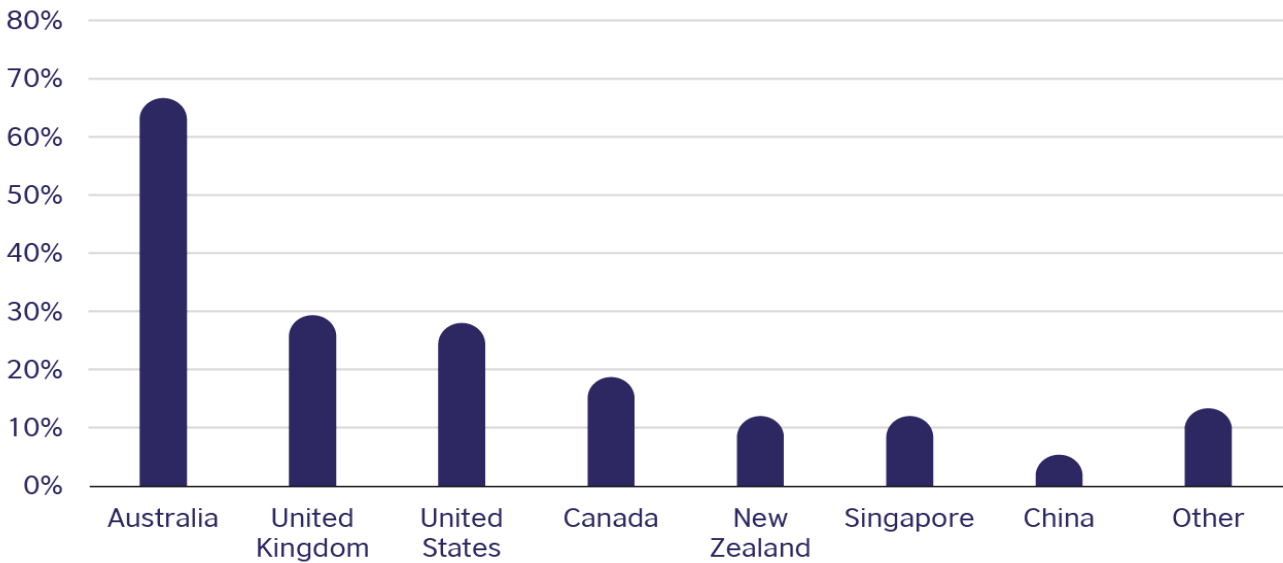
Singapore is a popular destination for Cambodian students because of its regional proximity, high-quality education system, developed economy and favourable post study work opportunities. The East Asia Institute of Management and Raffles College are popular destination institutions and short-term mobility is supported by the Temasek Foundation. According to Springboard, Singapore attracts students from the wider ASEAN region to study UK programmes, sometimes transferring to the UK to study at postgraduate level. Springboard sends 30 to 40 students to Kaplan Singapore each year and Kaplan regularly visits the international schools in Phnom Penh.

Thailand, Japan and South Korea were all cited as offering generous scholarships. A modest number of Cambodians study in Malaysia, often on religious studies programmes funded by the Malaysian government. Springboard does not send students to Malaysia and few Cambodians are believed to be studying at UK campuses in Malaysia.

The profile of students considering studying in the UK are reportedly drawn from the wealthiest segment of society and the UK is increasingly seen as a prestigious study destination among the top echelons of Cambodian society. One of the leading international schools in Phnom Penh has seen growth in mobility to the UK, from two students in 2017/18, to eight in 2018/19 to sixteen in 2019/20. UCAS is viewed as a transparent application system and the Russel Group brand ensures that applications are made all over England. In Australia, it is generally either Melbourne or Sydney. Cambodia is also classified by the UK as a low visa risk country, which has encouraged agents such as IDP to work with more UK universities.

Insights from the student survey administered in October 2020 align with much of the interview feedback discussed above.

Figure 6: Student survey. “In which of the following countries are you considering to study?”



Survey data based on 75 responses. The ‘other’ category includes Germany, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Malaysia, South Korea and Thailand. As multiple options could be selected, data exceeds 100 per cent.

Figure 6 shows that 67 per cent of respondents are considering studying in Australia in 2021/22, over twice the proportion considering any other individual destination. The data also supports the view that the UK has continued to gain ground on the US since 2018/19 – the last year for which enrolment data are available – and could well be on track to becoming the second most popular English-speaking destination. While interest in Singapore is confirmed with 12 per cent of respondents considering studying there – as much as reported considering New Zealand.

A separate survey question found that the most important factor when selecting a country for overseas study is ‘reputation for high-quality education’, selected by 75 per cent of respondents. This was followed by ‘tuition fees and living expenses’ (36 per cent), ‘opportunity for employment in the country after graduation’ (35 per cent) and ‘reputation as a safe country’ (32 per cent).

Challenges facing the UK

Notwithstanding the growing interest in the UK, feedback from the interviews suggests that the UK is facing several key challenges in Cambodia:

- Lack of branding and information has resulted in poor awareness about the UK’s education offer. For many students, knowledge about the UK appears to be limited to the Chevening scholarship scheme.
- Low engagement by UK universities. Engagement is perceived as low because mobility to the UK is low; which in turn is low because of lack of engagement – a case of chicken and egg. Australian and US universities have a far more active presence in the market.

- There appears to be a widespread misperception among Cambodians that the UK is a more expensive study destination than Australia, when in fact the opposite is the case, particularly at postgraduate level. The cost of living is also perceived as higher in the UK (especially in London) than in Australia. The students who participated in the focus group considered cost as the main barrier to studying in the UK.

UK's Graduate Route

Mixed views were evident on the significance on the reintroduction of the UK's Graduate Route. According to IDP, migration is a major factor in considering where to study and students feel they deserve to remain in-country for a period after graduation, having spent so much on tuition fees and living expenses. This view was supported by feedback from the student focus group and the student survey where 'opportunity for employment in the country after graduation' was considered a key factor in selecting a country for overseas study. The mid-tier market in Cambodia is seen as most likely to be influenced by the visa policy change, given their constrained financial resources and greater need for labour market experience. However, poor awareness about the UK and lack of engagement by UK universities means that few Cambodian students are likely to know about the policy change. Therefore, on balance, the availability of the Graduate Route may have a moderately positive impact on recruitment at best.

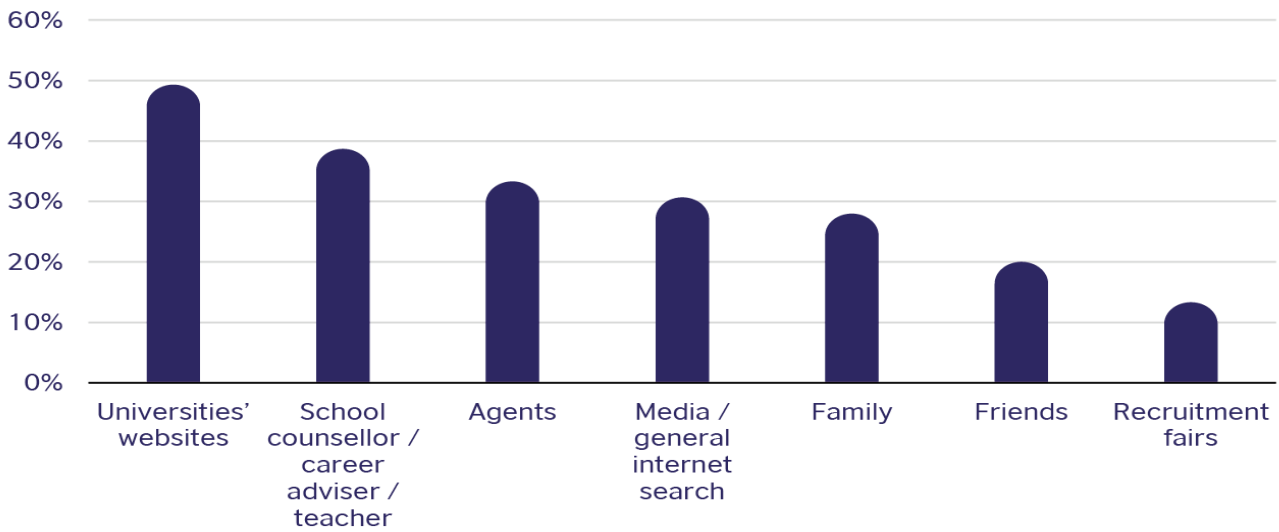
3.4 Reaching the target market

According to the interview feedback from agents and international schools, parents are the key decision makers in relation to country of study, though students have more freedom to select individual institutions. The students in the focus group selected 'parents' as the chief decision makers, followed by 'students themselves', 'other family members', and 'teachers'.

In Cambodia, it is common for students who study abroad to return home to work in their parent's business or establish their own business. This was confirmed by several students in the focus group discussion, who overall presented as an entrepreneurial group.

Responses to the student survey show that key sources of information for students in Cambodia include 'university websites', 'school counsellors & teachers' and 'agents' – in that order. This emphasises the importance for UK universities of having a Cambodia page on their website. Interestingly, recruitment fairs did not feature as a key source of information in deciding on where to study overseas, suggesting that such events are underprovided in Cambodia.

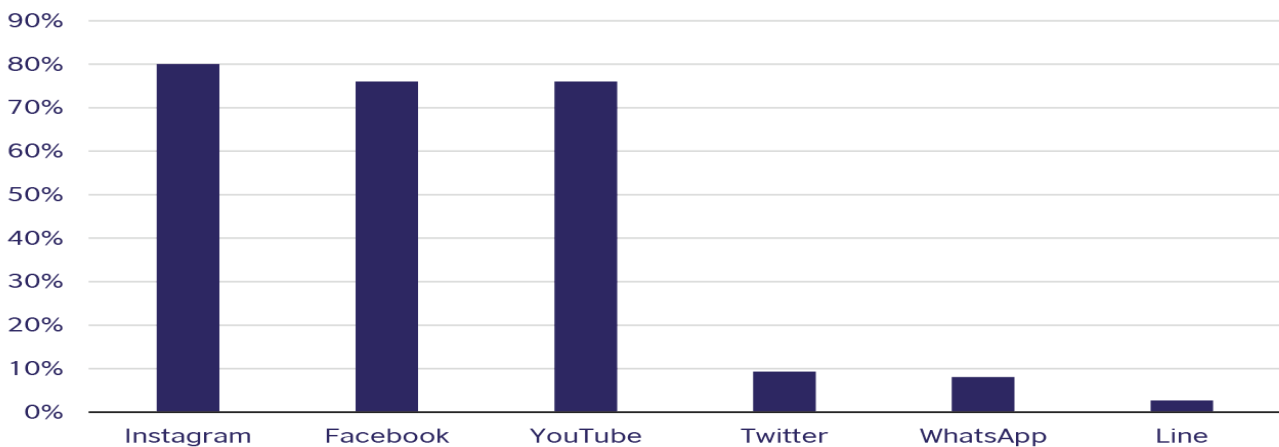
Figure 7: Student survey: “What are your main sources of information in deciding on where to study overseas?”



Survey data based on 75 responses. As multiple options could be selected, data exceeds 100 per cent.

The main social media platforms used by students in Cambodia were selected as Instagram, Facebook and YouTube, with other platforms far less commonly used.

Figure 8: Student survey: “What are your main sources of information in deciding on where to study overseas?”



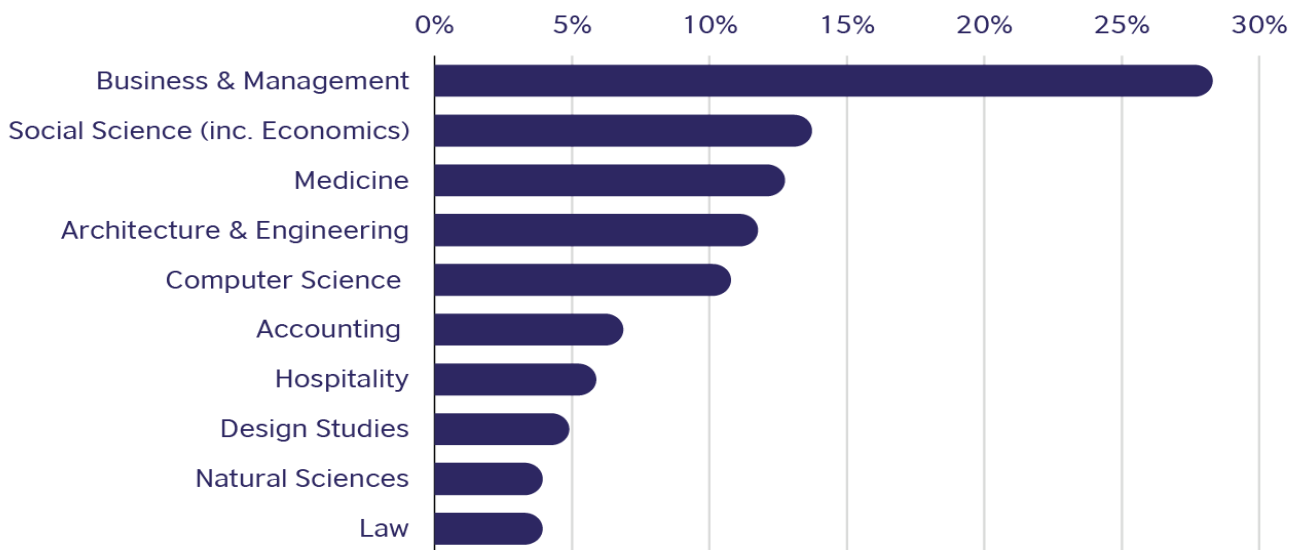
Survey data based on 75 responses. As multiple options could be selected, data exceeds 100 per cent.

International schools in Phnom Penh delivering an international curriculum are considered key targets for UK universities. Opportunities outside of the capital city are limited, though international schools in the touristy northern city of Siem Reap offer some potential.

Schools regularly accommodate visits from foreign universities and grant direct access to students. As the UCAS provisional deadline is at the end of January, students and parents typically make decisions by mid-January. Therefore, September to November is considered the best time of year to visit schools and run events and fairs. All the students who participated in the focus group had been actively researching overseas study options for less than one year, suggesting that visiting institutions have a short window of opportunity to influence students.

Popular programmes

Figure 9: Student survey. “What subject areas / courses are you most interested to study overseas?”



Survey data based on 75 responses.

According to responses to the student survey, Business & Management and Social Science programmes (such as Economics, Politics, Psychology and Mathematics) are of most interest to prospective international students. If compared against the subjects that Cambodian students in the UK studied in 2018/19, the survey data suggests that demand for Business and Social Science subjects is falling, while demand for Medicine, Computer Science, Hospitality and Design Studies subjects is increasing.

The agents interviewed reported seeing growth in demand from prospective international students for I.T., Big Data, Cyber Security, Medicine, Life Sciences, Nursing, Architecture, Hydroelectric Power and Psychology subjects.

3.5 Impacts of Covid-19 on educational opportunities

The number of recorded Covid-19 infections in Cambodia has been relatively low, standing at 291 at end of October 2020 and with no recorded deaths from the disease.¹⁵ Cambodia adopted a relatively strict approach in seeking to contain the pandemic, which has thus far proven successful in avoiding a public health crises in the country. The e-visa and visa-on-arrival programmes were suspended and all foreign travellers entering Cambodia are required to pay a deposit of US\$2,000 upon arrival at airports for mandatory Covid-19 testing and potential treatment services and must possess a Covid-19 negative medical certificate issued no more than 72 hours prior to the date of arrival.

¹⁵ Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Centre, 30 October 2020, <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/region/cambodia>

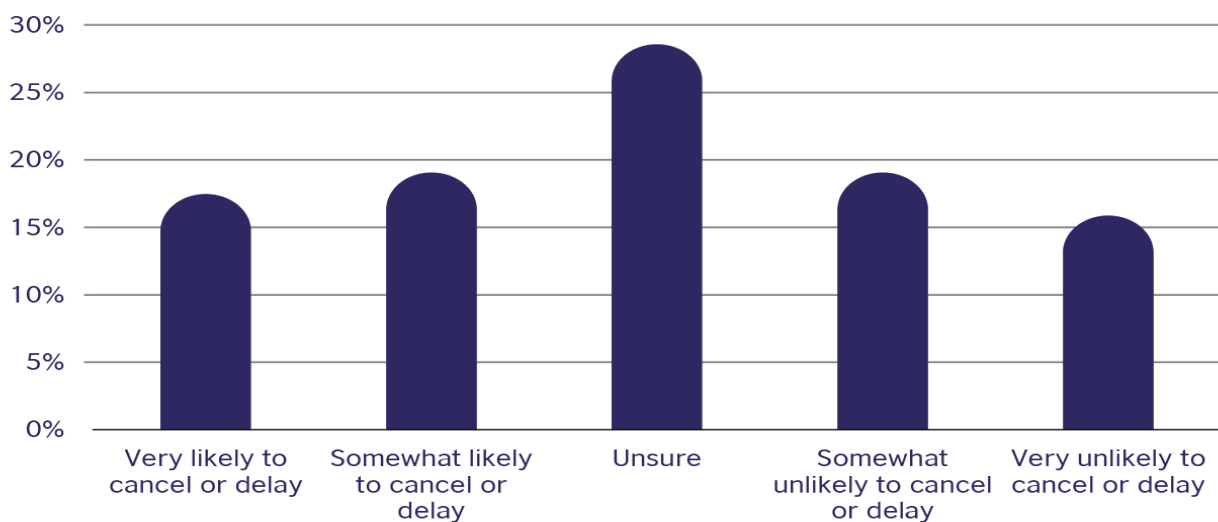
Schools and universities were closed for 6 months from mid-March to mid-September, reopening in phases based on implementation of safety standards. The high school diploma examination is planned for December 2020, having traditionally been held in August.

In July 2020, Cambodia became exempt from the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) advice against all non-essential international travel; and since early November travellers from Cambodia may now enter the UK without requiring to quarantine.¹⁶

While existing immigration restrictions associated with Covid-19 continue, visits by UK university staff to Cambodia are probably not practical and recruitment opportunities and partnership development may be best explored in an online setting.

Figure 10 shows that the Cambodian students surveyed were broadly split between whether they would, or would not, cancel / delay their study abroad plan for next year if the Covid-19 pandemic has not ended by then. However, the largest constituent was ‘unsure’ about what they would do, which is perhaps understandable given the lead time until such decisions would be required for the 2021/22 academic year.

Figure 10: Student survey. “Likelihood of cancelling or delaying study abroad plans for next year if the Covid-19 pandemic has not ended by then”.



Survey data based on 70 responses.

Similarly, students were about evenly split about whether they would study the Autumn 2021 semester fully online versus cancelling / delaying their study abroad plans – though the largest constituent selected ‘somewhat likely to cancel or delay’.

A further question exploring students concerns relating to study abroad in the context of Covid-19 found that ‘health & wellbeing’ is by far the key concern. Concerns related to ‘application difficulties’, ‘welcoming environment for foreigners’ and ‘finances’ also featured prominently – in that order - though less so for ‘availability of affordable flights’.

¹⁶ Gov.UK [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): travel corridors](#)

4 Conclusions

While Cambodia is a relatively small Southeast Asian student recruitment market, the UK is well placed to gain market share and potentially overtake the US as the second most popular English-speaking study destination by addressing a few key challenges.

There is a need to develop the UK's education brand in Cambodia in a coordinated manner. This includes greater dissemination of information about the UK's unique offer and addressing misperceptions about the cost of study in the UK. Greater awareness about the UK's Graduate Route and the benefits of a one-year master's degree will also boost interest in the UK.

Greater provision of, and participation in, recruitment events and school visits by UK institutions will drive greater mobility to the UK. However, the cost of such engagement must be carefully balanced against the realistic recruitment potential from such a small market. Cambodia may be best approached as part of a wider Southeast Asia recruitment portfolio, managed in parallel with other larger markets within the region and visited when the opportunity arises. For example, a flight to Phnom Penh from Bangkok takes just 1hr 15mins or from Hanoi takes 1hr 45mins.

Strong growth in the number of international schools in Cambodia bodes well, given that a high proportion of graduates from these institutions end up studying abroad. The main target market for UK universities is the upper-tier international schools in Phnom Penh. UK universities are advised to build relationships with school counsellors in these institutions, including inviting them to visit the UK when travel restrictions ease.

While Covid-19 travel restrictions remain in place, in-country engagement is unlikely to be practical. However, the trend towards online events - which has been accelerated by the global pandemic - may well suit UK universities in developing new relationships in Cambodia. The relatively restrictive immigration restrictions imposed by Australia and New Zealand for much of 2020 have provided an imperative for Cambodian students to learn more about alternative study destinations.

Rising proficiency in English language is encouraging and booming demand for language programmes and associated exams services presents opportunities for the UK's English language sector in Cambodia.

While demand for Business & Administration subjects predominate among prospective international students, growth areas include Medicine, Computer Science, Hospitality and Design Studies.

TNE opportunities for UK universities in Cambodia appear limited for the present. Cambodian universities have basic concerns relating to a chronic shortage of PhD trained faculty and a pressing need to raise teaching standards and address STEM skills gaps. Therefore, it may be too early for collaborative forms of TNE to develop; partnerships centred around knowledge transfer and capacity development appear more appropriate at this stage, such as those supported by the World Bank.

The high fees (\$9,000 per year) charged by AUPP for its US accredited TNE programmes appears to be addressing a relatively niche demand. In general, where students can afford it, study abroad is the preferred option. And while the only international branch campus in Cambodia – Malaysia’s Limkokwing University – attracts a few hundred students, its tuition fees (\$2,200) are arguably below that required by a UK campus to operate sustainably, particularly given the investment in fly-in faculty that would be required. That said, there appears to be some opportunity for UK universities with branch campuses in the region to target Cambodian students, with Singapore and China increasingly popular study destinations.