
**Study of DFAT's Australia Awards
in Cambodia**

**Tracer study of Cambodian alumni
(1996–2013)**

FINAL REPORT

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This report has been prepared by Ceri Bryant under management of the DFAT Education Resource Facility.

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List of acronyms

AAA–C	Alumni Association Australia–Cambodia
AAS	Australia Awards Scholarship
ADS	Australian Development Scholarships (now AAS)
ALA	Australian Leadership Award Scholarships (now AALP)
AEI	Australian Education International
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development (now DFAT)
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CMU	Carnegie Mellon University
DFAT	Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
ERF	Education Resource Facility
GoA	Government of Australia
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
OASIS	Online Australian Scholarships Information System
PDT	Pre-Departure Training
RGC	Royal Government of Cambodia
SCB	Scholarships and Alumni Branch (DFAT)

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Executive summary

Through its aid program, Australia offers Cambodian citizens long-term scholarships for tertiary training in Australia (the Australia Awards Scholarships (AAS) and its predecessors such as the Australian Development Scholarships). The country-specific objectives of the AAS program in Cambodia are: (a) to increase the skills and capacity of the men and women of Cambodia (including people with a disability and those from outside Phnom Penh); (b) to support the men and women of Cambodia (including people with a disability and those from outside Phnom Penh) to make a contribution to Cambodia's development; (c) to support the men and women of Cambodia (including people with a disability and those from outside Phnom Penh) to develop ongoing links with Australian people, organisations and institutions; and (d) recognition by the Cambodia Government and other development partners that Australia is an active responsive contributor to the economic and social development of Cambodia.

This tracer study aims to gather data on the experiences of the AAS alumni to inform assessment of progress against the program's objectives,¹ and to identify barriers to that progress. The study findings will be used by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAT) in Cambodia to report on the AAS and to improve its management and effectiveness. The findings will also be used by the DFAT Scholarships and Alumni Branch (SCB) in Canberra for global reporting on the awards. In addition, the study gathered data on alumni and student perceptions of Australian higher education that will be utilised by DFAT to better understand how to attract high quality applicants from Cambodia and to maximise the positive experience of awardees while in Australia.

The study was conducted from September to December 2014 by an independent study team. Its scope included the 394 AAS, Australian Leadership Awards Scholarships (ALA) and AusAID Carnegie-Mellon University (CMU) alumni who completed their postgraduate qualification between 1996 and 2013. The methodology included: a desk review of alumni data and background documents; a tracer survey of all contactable alumni (with 220 respondents, a 56 per cent response rate); and semi-structured interviews with selected alumni. A key survey limitation was the reluctance of many alumni to respond to the survey request and to participate in the qualitative interviews. It is likely that the frequency of program M&E activities relating to alumni has caused survey fatigue, with the potential to result in a negative impression of the awards program.

Findings

Increased skills and capacity

The awards have contributed to the number of Cambodians with internationally recognised qualifications, as well as with the 'soft-skills' necessary in the workplace. Between 1996 and 2013, 394 AAS, ALA and CMU alumni returned to Cambodia with postgraduate qualifications (including 94 per cent with a Masters and 4 per cent with a PhD degree). The scholarships provided new skills and knowledge in a wide range of fields of study, with the majority studying in society and culture (30%), management and commerce (30%), health (12%), and agriculture and environment (11%). Although over time selected against a range of different priority fields of study, 29 per cent of alumni had studied in current areas of priority identified by DFAT and the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC), 21 per cent in cross-cutting and 50 per cent in other areas.

In addition to the formal technical skills and knowledge acquired, the survey respondents indicated that during their award preparation they had also improved their capacity in soft-skills such as English language, research, analytical and critical thinking, and other communication skills which had proved valuable on their return to Cambodia. The respondents also reported benefitting from exposure to a different way of life outside of Cambodia – for example, from being in a democratic country with sound legal and social protection systems and a high quality tertiary education sector.

¹ Noting that the alumni were selected over an almost 20-year period, under a range of different program goals and objectives. Achievement of the objective "Recognition by the RGC and other development partners ..." was not assessed as part of this study.

Only a small percentage of survey respondents (14%) reported negative impact from their award (which included on the alumni's family life, their professional life or on their organisation). A number of alumni advised that undertaking research activities in Australia was particularly challenging as they had no prior experience in conducting research. This had resulted in difficulties (and delays) in preparation of their initial research plans for their studies.

The program objectives include that both males and females, people with disability and those from outside Phnom Penh benefit from the awards. The study found, however, that overall only 32 per cent of the 1996 to 2013 alumni population were female, 10 per cent of all alumni are living in provincial areas, and only 3 per cent of the survey respondents reported a disability.

Contribution to Cambodia's development

There was strong evidence to indicate that, through the knowledge and skills gained under the awards, the majority of the survey respondents have made significant contributions to their organisation, to their community and towards national development.

The study found that over 96 per cent of the 394 alumni are currently employed. Almost all of the survey respondents reported finding relevant employment on award completion. The majority of the respondents returned to the same employer as before their award, particularly those in the public sector. However, over half of those survey respondents who did have to look for work after their award spent three months or more before finding employment. Respondents reported the main challenges in finding work as: lack of relevant work experience in their field of study; not many job opportunities at time of graduation; many applicants for one position; many jobs not publically advertised; and that recruitment did not always appear to be merit based.

Two-thirds of the alumni population are currently employed by the public sector, 20 per cent by a civil society/non-government organisation (CSO/NGO) or donor organisation and 11 per cent in the private sector/self-employed. The alumni are employed in over 115 different organisations. The employers of the largest number of alumni are the: Ministry of Health; Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries; and Ministry of Economy and Finance. Given the large number of employees in these ministries, it is perhaps unrealistic to expect that there are enough Australian-trained alumni to create a critical mass to influence significant change, particularly if widely spread throughout the ministry.

Almost three-quarters of the survey respondents have been promoted since their award, with nearly half of the survey respondents (47%) currently employed in (senior) managerial roles, particularly if working in the public sector. More recently graduated respondents were more likely to be in professional or associate professional/clerical roles. The higher proportion of managerial roles of the 1996–2003 respondents indicates sustained award outcomes and the potential to contribute more meaningfully to their organisation and Cambodia's development, through being in decision-making roles where they are more likely to be using their leadership and analytical/critical thinking skills.

Alumni perceived that their knowledge and skills and knowledge were highly relevant to their current job and had been utilised to a considerable extent. Over one half of survey respondents (53%) considered that the technical content, knowledge and skills gained during their scholarship were highly relevant to their current job. Alumni also perceived that their award had had a significant impact in terms of their career. The enhanced skills and knowledge of survey respondents were being utilised in a number of ways: through greater technical/operational responsibilities (91%); a greater role in policy development (80%); greater financial responsibilities (66%); and/or are supervising more staff (68%).

There is a mixed picture of career mobility. The 2009-2013 survey respondents, particularly those from the open category were found to be relatively mobile in their employment, whilst a significant proportion of the 1996-2003 respondents, particularly those employed in the public sector, were in more stable employment. Survey respondents currently working in the public sector were significantly more likely to have worked at their organisation for ten years or more (54%) than those working in other sectors (15%). Of the 2009-2013 respondents, public sector employees were significantly more likely to be with the same employer since their return from their award (87%) compared to those in the other sectors (49%). Survey respondents left their first employment after their award due to limited opportunity to use their skills (73%); to broaden their experience (68%);

and due to limited opportunities for promotion (51%). Overall, the majority of job movement is from the public sector to the other sectors. Over 90 per cent of the awards were made to public sector employees, however 68 per cent of the alumni are currently recorded as still working in that sector.

Two-thirds of the survey respondents considered that their award had been utilised 'to a great extent' for Cambodia's development. In contributing to their organisation, the majority of respondents provided tangible examples of the use of the knowledge/skills gained during their study, producing a range of work outputs that are relevant to Cambodia's development. A quarter of the respondents (26%) have published research related to their scholarship area of study (48% of which were in an international academic journal).

Despite these overall positive outcomes, the vast majority of the survey respondents (86%) reported difficulties using their skills and knowledge. The respondents reported lack of opportunity to further develop skills/knowledge (61%), lack of resources and equipment (46%), resistance to new ways of working and thinking (45%), and lack of a professional network to share ideas (43%). The 2009-2013 respondents were significantly more likely to report difficulties in skill utilisation compared to the 1996-2003 alumni.

Only half of the respondents currently working (51%) reported that they had formally transferred (to a great extent) at least one of the technical/soft skills and knowledge learnt while undertaking the award. Less than a quarter of respondents reported that they had formally transferred their technical/subject matter related to course content to a great extent, although three-quarters transferred these skills informally. Only 18 per cent stated that their employer had provided support to 'a great extent' in using their skills/knowledge (and 40% to a medium extent). Many of the public sector alumni interviewed reported that although they had produced relevant outputs, these were not always used to contribute to Cambodia's development due to systemic barriers (such as entrenched bureaucracy, political interests, conservatism and corruption).

The alumni have made contributions beyond their main place of employment, with two-thirds of survey respondents (65%) using their skills to a great or medium extent outside of the workplace, including in community development. The majority of the alumni interviewed used their skills and knowledge in a second paid job – often teaching or short-term consultancy work with a CSO and/or in a voluntary capacity in educational or community organisations.

Not all of the increased skills and capacity are being directly used in Cambodia. Of the 394 alumni population, 14 per cent were recorded as living overseas. The main reasons stated by the survey respondents for leaving Cambodia were: to join family overseas; for a more stable environment; to undertake more study; and for employment-related reasons.

Alumni linkages with Australia

The study found that, while alumni formed important and sustained linkages with other AAS alumni (supported through the Australian Alumni Association – Cambodia (AAA-C)), the program objective of sustained linkages by alumni with Australia was only partially achieved. While some survey respondents reported social links with Australians they had met on award or academic/research links with their former institutions, the study found that over one-third of survey respondents have no contact with local communities in Australia (48%), Australian students (40%), former institution staff and lecturers (39%), and AAS students from other countries (38%). The earlier 1996–2003 respondents were even less likely to maintain contact, with 60 per cent never having contact with Australian students and 48 per cent never having contact with former institution staff and lecturers. Respondents that did maintain linkages with Australia found them useful to: seek advice on research/work issues; receive up to date professional knowledge; find out about future study opportunities; to request references; look for research funding; and to maintain personal relationships.

However, one-third of respondents (32%) do currently have contact with at least one Australian organisation in Cambodia, through their work, their former institution alumni association and/or with contacts introduced through the AAA-C. Almost all alumni are AAA-C members, although not necessarily active. Respondents see the primary benefits of being AAA-C members as to keep in contact with other Cambodian alumni, to find out about job opportunities, to keep up to date with knowledge/skills and for social and community activities, rather than to maintain links to Australia.

Impressions of Australia

All but one of the survey respondents reported that they would recommend Australia as a higher education study destination. Overall, 70 per cent of respondents reported a very positive impression of Australia and 24 per cent a positive impression. One third of respondents (35%) mentioned the positive impression that Australia was a developed country, democratic and with a good legal and welfare system. Survey respondents also considered positively: Australia's people (26%); the quality of Australia's education (22%), the safe and peaceful study environment (11%), Australia's support for Cambodia's development (9%) and the multicultural environment (10%).

Although only one respondent reported an overall negative impression of Australia, almost half (45%) cited some negative impressions of Australia. The most frequently negative impressions mentioned by respondents were discrimination/racism (41%) and the weather (13%). Other negative impressions were: scholarships policy; the cost of the pre-departure training; the cost of living; crime/drugs; leaving their family; returning home; Australia's policy on refugees; the study program; settling family into Australia; and the difficulty in making friends.

Recommendations

Inclusive aims: To more effectively meet the objectives of the awards, it is recommended that DFAT accelerate its initiatives to achieve gender equity in the offer of the awards (Recommendation 1) and also increase the proportion of award offers to candidates from provincial areas and from organisations supporting people with disability (Recommendation 2).

Finding work on return: Given the difficulties for some alumni in finding work, it is recommended that consideration be given to providing additional support for alumni to find relevant employment on their return (Recommendation 3).

Critical mass of influence: To create a critical mass of influence, it is recommended that DFAT consider focusing the public category awards on specific target departments within individual ministries (Recommendation 4).

Supporting skill utilisation: To maximise outcomes, it is recommended that DFAT prioritise a proportion of the awards to Cambodians working in organisations that are able to demonstrate that they both support the alumni to utilise their skills/knowledge and also that alumni outputs are utilised to contribute to Cambodia's development (Recommendation 5). It is also recommended that the reintegration workshops provide training to newly returned graduates in skills/knowledge transfer and influencing change (Recommendation 6).

Linkages with Australia: To better achieve the program objective of sustained linkages between alumni and Australia, it is recommended that: (a) DFAT consider ways to improve the linkages made between Cambodian awardees and Australians while they are on award (Recommendation 7); (b) the AAA-C deliver a strong program of activities that connect alumni to Australian organisations and individuals (Recommendation 8).

Impressions of Australia: To mitigate negative impressions of Australia, it is recommended that: (a) pre-departure training on discrimination be reviewed to determine whether it can be strengthened to better help Cambodian awardees address any discrimination while in Australia (Recommendation 9) and (b) level of the pre-departure training stipend be reviewed for financially disadvantaged students (Recommendation 10).

Conducting research: To maximise the quality of awardee research, it is recommended that the pre-departure training be reviewed to determine whether it can be strengthened to better prepare awardees for conducting research in Australia (Recommendation 11).

Program M&E: It is recommended that the frequency and targeting of M&E activities for the program be reviewed so as to avoid survey fatigue among alumni, and a potentially negative impression of the awards program (Recommendation 12). Given the proportion of overseas alumni, it is also recommended that future program M&E include a study on the extent to which overseas alumni make an ongoing contribution to Cambodia's development (Recommendation 13).

1 Introduction

1.1 Study background and purpose

Australia Awards are a key aid modality for the Australian Government over a range of countries in the Indo-Pacific region. The awards are delivered through a range of mechanisms – bilaterally, globally and directly through Australian and partner country agencies in the public and private sectors. The high-level objectives of the Australia Awards Scholarships (AAS) are:

- to develop capacity and leadership skills so that individuals can contribute to development in their own country
- to build people-to-people links at the individual, institutional and country levels.

The AAS strive to develop leadership potential and stimulate lasting change by empowering a global network of talented individuals through high-quality education experiences in Australia. Recipients return home with new ideas and knowledge, and the ability to make a significant contribution to their home countries as leaders in their field. The awards also demonstrate Australia's commitment to providing education opportunities to improve living standards and stimulate economic growth in developing countries. A condition of the award is that on completion of study, the awardees must return to their home country for at least two years to use their new skills and knowledge to contribute to their country's development.

Australia has provided over 400 development scholarships to Cambodia for postgraduate study in Australia since 1994, mainly through the AAS (and its predecessors). The country-specific objectives of the Australia Awards in Cambodia are:

- to increase the skills and capacity of the men and women of Cambodia (including people with a disability and those from outside Phnom Penh)
- to support the men and women of Cambodia (including people with a disability and those from outside Phnom Penh) to make a contribution to Cambodia's development
- to support the men and women of Cambodia (including people with a disability and those from outside Phnom Penh) to develop ongoing links with Australian people, organisations and institutions
- recognition by the Cambodia Government and other development partners that Australia is an active responsive contributor to the economic and social development of Cambodia.

The Australian aid program in Cambodia has completed a number of evaluations to assess the effectiveness of the Australia Awards, including tracer surveys in 1999, 2004 and 2009. This 2014 tracer study will update DFAT's understanding of the outcomes of the awards. The study aims to gather data on the experiences of AAS alumni, to inform assessment of progress against the first three AAS objectives,² and to identify barriers to that progress. The tracer study focuses on three main areas of alumni experience: (i) career mobility; (ii) output, skills transfer and contribution; and (iii) people-to-people linkages.

The study findings will be used by DFAT in Phnom Penh and the Managing Contractor in Cambodia to report on the Australia Awards in Cambodia and to improve their management and effectiveness. The DFAT Scholarships and Alumni Branch (SCB) in Canberra will use the information collected in this study for global reporting and the triennial global meta-analysis of the impact of the Australia Awards Scholarships.

The study also sought data on alumni perceptions of Australian higher education, compared with other international education opportunities. DFAT will utilise this data to better understand how to attract high quality applicants for its Cambodian scholarships and to maximise their positive experience while on award.

² Noting that the alumni were selected over an almost twenty year period under a range of different program objectives (including those of the CMU). The achievement of the fourth program objective "Recognition by the RGC and other development partners that Australia is an active, responsive contributor to the economic and social development of Cambodia" was not assessed as part of this study.

This report presents the findings of the tracer study and associated recommendations for improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the Australia Awards in Cambodia.

1.2 Country context

Cambodia had an estimated population of over 15 million in 2014, mainly living in its 21 provinces. The capital city of Phnom Penh has a population of over one million people. Cambodia has made considerable progress in raising living standards but remains one of the poorest countries in East Asia. About 20 per cent of the population lives in poverty and a similar proportion sit just above the poverty line. While Cambodia has made important strides towards achieving its Millennium Development Goals, huge challenges remain. Australia is helping Cambodia continue its progress towards being a prosperous, stable and democratic nation in South East Asia. Australian support to Cambodia is targeted at increasing economic growth through investments in infrastructure, health, agricultural productivity and education. The program has a particular focus on reducing violence against women and improving their economic opportunities. Australia is also a long standing partner in strengthening the justice system in Cambodia.³

Cambodia still faces a number of development challenges, including effective management of land and natural resources, environmental sustainability, and good governance. Corruption and weak public service delivery impede inclusive development. The key challenge going forward is to stimulate the agricultural and tourism sectors to once again become strong engines of growth supporting poverty reduction, as well as to expand and sustain growth in manufacturing including garments.⁴

Over the last two decades, higher education in Cambodia, particularly in the private sector, has grown significantly. Total enrolment in both public and private higher education institutions has grown rapidly over the past decade, from a little over 10,000 in 1992 to 137,253 in 2009. Despite this progress, only 5 per cent of the tertiary-age population is enrolled in tertiary education which is quite low in comparison with an average of East Asia and the Pacific region⁵. In 2012, there were 32 public and 45 private higher education institutions, offering specialised degrees in nearly hundred fields ranging from foreign languages, health science, engineering, agriculture, tourism, business management to law and economics. The issue of quality continues to be a concern for all education stakeholders and policymakers due to the fast-growing numbers of higher education institutions, in combination with loose management of the providers and a lack of guidance from the central level. In addition, sufficient quality assurance systems have not yet been developed and there are still many universities which are well below national or regional quality standards.⁶

2 Methodology

2.1 Overview

The study was conducted from September to December 2014 by an independent team under the management of the DFAT Education Resource Facility (ERF).⁷ The study used a mixed methods design, with both qualitative and quantitative data collected and analysed depending on the nature of the key question being addressed, to ensure robust evidence to inform the study's findings. The key components of the study included: review of documents relating to the development context of the Australia Awards in Cambodia; analysis of DFAT data on the Cambodia alumni population, from the Online Australia Awards Scholarship Information System (OASIS)/Alumni database; a tracer survey of all traceable alumni; and qualitative interviews with selected alumni. The study methodology is described further in Annex A.

³ <http://aid.dfat.gov.au/countries/eastasia/cambodia/Pages/home.aspx>

⁴ <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/cambodia/overview#1>

⁵ Damico (2010). Higher Education and Skills for the Labor Market in Cambodia

<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTEASTASIAPACIFIC/Resources/Cambodia-HEandSkillsforLaborMarket.pdf>

⁶ <http://www.unescobkk.org/education/resources/resources/education-system-profiles/cambodia/higher-tvet/>

⁷ Ceri Bryant (Team Leader), Lina Khoun (Research Assistant)

2.2 Survey scope

The study scope included alumni of: the Australia Award Scholarships, previously the Australian Development Scholarships (ADS); the Australia Awards Leadership Program (ALA), previously the Australian Leadership Awards Scholarships; and of the AusAID–Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) Awards. Table 1 shows that there were 394 alumni (the study population) who completed their qualification under the AAS, ALA and CMU awards in the academic years between 1996–2013.⁸

Table 1: Number of awards completed by award scheme and level of study

Scheme	Masters	PhD	PostGrad Cert/Dip	Non-award	Total
AAS	357		7	1	365
ALA	7	15			22
CMU	7				7
Total	371	15	7	1	394

2.3 Tracer survey

The tracer survey content and delivery mode used for the study was consistent with the DFAT SCB guidance.⁹ To reduce the length of the survey, the questions relating to first employment after scholarship were only asked of more recent graduates (completing their awards between 2009–2013). In addition to the standard survey questions, some questions were added at DFAT Cambodia's request to obtain data on alumni perceptions of Australia.

Before the survey period, DFAT Cambodia (and the Managing Contractor) obtained alumni contact details for 94 per cent of the 394 alumni. A mixed mode approach was planned for survey delivery, with an initial request to all alumni with email addresses (including those obtained by the Research Assistant) to complete an online survey (using SurveyMonkey), with follow-up phone/email contacts to offer alumni to complete the survey face-to-face, by telephone or by post if preferred. Although only a small number of emails bounced, it is not known how many of the initial email addresses were still actively monitored by alumni. Many alumni reported that they did not see the email request as it had been moved to their junk/spam folder. A range of reminders was made to alumni to complete the survey, until a minimum response rate had been achieved. Table 2 shows the response rate by award completion year.

Table 2: Tracer survey response rate by award completion year

Award completion year	Number of alumni	Number of survey responses	Response rate %
2009–2013	153	107	70%
2004–2008	114	53	46%
1996–2003	127	60	47%
Total	394	220	56%

Source: DFAT OASIS databases; Cambodia Tracer Survey, September/October 2014

The findings of the tracer survey, based on 220 survey responses are summarised below, with the detailed cross-tabulations provided in Annex C.

⁸ The OASIS/Alumni data contained 422 alumni award records. As two alumni had two award records each, there were 420 individual alumni recorded. Of these records, the alumni not in scope are: (a) 17 alumni whose award is recorded as finishing after January 2014 and are not included as they will not have been in the workforce sufficiently long to reliably answer the survey questions; (b) 7 alumni with incomplete records; (c) 2 alumni recorded as being deceased.

⁹ DFAT (2011). Australia Awards Introductory Guidance on Monitoring and Evaluation for DFAT Development Awards (2011)

2.4 Qualitative interviews

Qualitative semi-structured interviews were held with 20 alumni (nine female and eleven male) in the capital city Phnom Penh and two provincial locations in Cambodia to explore specific aspects of the scholarships outcomes in more detail. They were undertaken after the tracer survey to allow the survey findings/data to inform the direction of the in-depth interviews, both in determining who to interview and the themes to be explored. Participants were purposefully selected to represent diverse alumni responses (positive and negative) to the relevant tracer survey questions relating to: career mobility; leadership; outputs, skill utilisation and transfer; contribution to development; linkages with Australia; and perceptions of Australia education. As the Managing Contractor had recently conducted an Alumni Engagement Survey, alumni association membership and activities were not discussed in the qualitative interviews.

To gain additional insights on perceptions of the scholarships and Australian education, a small number (six) of Cambodians students who were offered an AAS in 2014 and then withdrew from the program were asked a small number of questions by the Research Assistant, or by email where they lived overseas.

2.5 Study analysis and limitations

As indicated in Table 2, 220 alumni responded to the tracer survey request, an overall 56 per cent response rate (of the alumni in scope). Although this is lower than the 78 per cent response rate for the 2009 study, it is considered a reasonable response rate given the inclusion of alumni who graduated more than 10 years ago. The overall response rate provides a reasonable basis for analysis and for drawing conclusions about outcomes from the Australia Awards in Cambodia. The survey response rate by gender, level of study and award type was not significantly different to that found in the alumni population (see Annex A). However, perhaps not surprisingly, given the time since their award, there was a significantly lower ($p < 0.01$) response rate¹⁰ from alumni who completed their award more than five years ago and from alumni living overseas.

Many of the alumni contacted by the Research Assistant reported some confusion between this 2014 tracer survey and a number of alumni surveys that had been conducted in the past year by the Managing Contractor on behalf of DFAT.¹¹ Many alumni expressed survey fatigue, stating that they had already provided their views on the awards many times, including in a survey just a few months previously. Many alumni were also reluctant to participate in the qualitative interviews. **It is recommended that the frequency and targeting of M&E activities for the program be reviewed so as to avoid survey fatigue among alumni, and a potentially negative impression of the awards program** (Recommendation 12).

The small number of ALA/CMU alumni in the tracer survey scope (29 of the 394 alumni) and the number of survey responses from this sub-group limited the range of data analysis that could be undertaken by award type. There are similar constraints on analysing the data by level of study (with only 23 alumni who undertook other than a Masters degree) and by award type (with alumni from the open category for CSO/NGO and private sector awardees only returning to Cambodia from 2010–11).

This report includes both tracer survey findings for which statistically significant differences were found and findings for which relevant relationships were identified but which were not statistically significant. Where findings are statistically significant the Chi Squared test has been applied the statistical information provided. Gender analysis was applied to all statistical analysis but was included in this report only where significant variation was found.

The study also had the following limitations. There was a lack of a control group of non-alumni upon which to measure success. Alumni are likely to be high achievers and so may be more likely to be successful regardless of achieving a scholarship. There are also some biases inherent in the

¹⁰ Pearson Chi-Test $p < 0.01$ (1%)

¹¹ This included the program's Year One Survey (for graduates 12 months after returning to Cambodia), the Year Two Survey (different, although cumulative - for graduates around 24 months after returning to Cambodia) and in July–August 2014 a one-off Alumni Engagement Survey to encourage greater Alumni Association Australia-Cambodia involvement

tracer survey methodology in that: the vast majority of data used in this study was gathered from the alumni themselves (a not necessarily objective source); the primary method of contacting alumni and survey data collection online was more likely to have captured the subset of alumni who had access to internet (biased to those working in formal employment or living in urban areas); highly active alumni may be less likely to respond to the survey or attend interview; conversely, out of work or dissatisfied people may be less likely to share their experiences.

Despite careful prompting, some of the alumni interviewed as part of the study were reluctant to talk openly about the difficulties faced in reaching senior positions due to the lack of merit-based promotion, in utilising their skills due to the “politicisation” of decision-making at the senior level or about holding second jobs in addition to their core public sector position.

3 Profile of scholarships awarded

3.1 Overview

The personal/award profile of the 394 alumni population, as extracted by DFAT from the OASIS and Alumni databases (and as further detailed in Annex B) include that:

- 32 per cent are female (38% of the 2009-2013 alumni)
- 93 per cent received ADS awards (365 alumni), 5 per cent received an ALA award (22 alumni) and 2 per cent a CMU award (7 alumni)
- 32 per cent of the alumni completed their awards between 1996–2003, 29 per cent between 2004–2008 and 39 per cent between 2009–2013
- of the 365 AAS awards, 90 per cent were public category with 10 per cent in the open category; 29 ALA/CMU awards are classified as ‘other’
- 94 per cent of the alumni completed a Masters degree (371 alumni), 4 per cent completed a PhD (15 alumni), 2 per cent a Graduate Diploma or Certificate, and one alumni undertook non-award studies under an ALA
- the majority of the alumni studied in the following fields: society and culture (30%), management and commerce (30%), health (12%), and agriculture and environment (11%)
- 45 per cent of the alumni were under 40 years of age, 46 per cent between 40–49 years of age and 10 per cent 50 years and over. Of the recent alumni (2009–2013), 81 per cent were under 40 years of age
- 56 (14%) of the alumni were recorded as living overseas
- of the 338 alumni recorded as living in Cambodia,¹² 269 were living in Phnom Penh and 26 outside of the capital. The in-Cambodia location of 46 alumni was not recorded.

3.2 Award category

Between 1994 and 2008, 20 awards were available annually to Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) employees. Since 2009, the number of awards was increased and an open category introduced for applicants from civil society organisations (CSOs) and non-government organisations (NGOs). Applicants from private sector organisations have been included in the open category since 2012. RGC officials who did not meet the requirements to apply under the public category are also eligible to apply for open category awards. In 2014, 55 AAS were offered – 20 to public sector applicants and 35 to open category applicants.

3.3 Field of study

As shown in Tables 3 and 4, the scholarships provided alumni with new skills and knowledge in a wide range of fields of study. The alumni were selected to undertake tertiary qualifications in areas considered of national priority at the time of their selection. These priorities have changed over the

¹² Data was not available on the province of origin of the alumni

period in which the awards have been offered. Table 3 shows that female alumni were less likely than males to have undertaken the traditionally male area of studies of engineering and agriculture but more likely to have undertaken education, and management and commerce.

Table 3: Field of study by gender (alumni population)

Field study	Female %	Male %
Agriculture, Environment and Related Studies	9	12
Education	9	6
Engineering	2	6
Health	11	12
Information Technology	2	3
Management and Commerce	34	28
Science	2	3
Society and Culture	31	30
Total	100	100

Table 4 shows whether the field of study taken by the 394 alumni population was in a current priority, cross-cutting or other area. This indicates that, overall, 29 per cent had studied in a current area of priority, as agreed between DFAT and the RGC and aligned with Cambodia's National Strategic Development Plan and DFAT's priority sectors for Cambodia. The majority of alumni studied in cross-cutting courses (21%), with half in other fields of study. Not surprisingly, given that earlier alumni were selected against different criteria, there was a significantly higher proportion ($p < 0.01$)¹³ of awards made to the current priority/cross-cutting areas (57%) between 2009–2013 than in earlier years (45%).

Table 4: Priority study area by award completion year (alumni population)

Priority study area	1996–2003 %	2004–2008 %	2009–2013 %	Total %
Agriculture and Rural Development	11	5	15	11
Health	15	10	10	12
Infrastructure	9	2	3	5
Law and Justice	0	2	4	2
Cross-cutting	14	19	28	21
Other	50	62	40	50
Total	100	100	100	100

3.4 Employment

Table 5 shows the sector of the latest recorded employer (based on the data in the Alumni database and updated with tracer survey data) of alumni by award category. This shows that 68 per cent of the alumni population are recorded as being employed by the RGC, 20 per cent by a CSO/donor organisation, and 11 per cent in the private sector. The employment sector is not known for 1 per cent of all alumni. As only 9 per cent of the awards have been offered in the open category, this points to a high level of movement of alumni out of the public sector at some stage after their award. Not surprisingly, a higher proportion of public category alumni (77%) are employed in the public sector than the other award categories. There was no significant difference

¹³ Pearson Chi-test

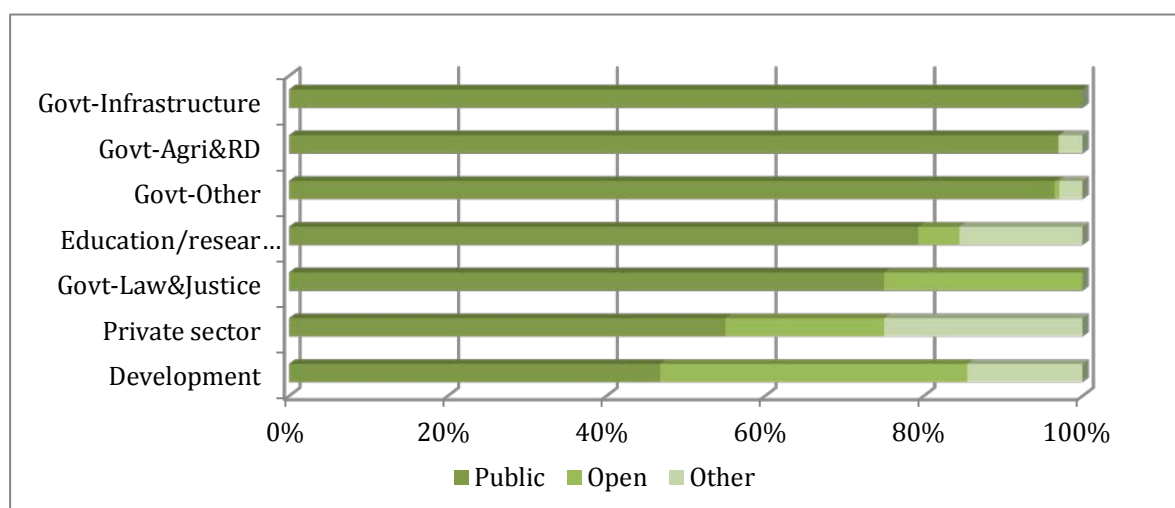
in employment sector by gender or award end year. Alumni employed in a CSO/NGO/donor organisation were significantly more likely ($p < 0.01$) to have studied in a priority or cross-cutting area (68%) than those working in the RGC (46%). This was particularly so for the 2009–2013 alumni.

Table 5: Employer by award category (alumni population)

Employer	Public %	Open %	Other %	Total %
RGC	77	6	38	68
CSO/Donor	14	66	34	20
Private sector	7	29	28	11
Not known	1	0	0	1
Total	100	100	100	100

Employer organisations were also classified as to their primary function. For example, an education institution might be included in a range of sectors depending on its ownership/management. Figure 1 shows that 44 per cent of alumni are working in a RGC ministry not in a current priority sector, 16 per cent work in a development function, 15 per cent in education and research, 9 per cent in agriculture and rural development, 7 per cent in health and 5 per cent in other private business.

Figure 1: Employer function by award category (alumni population)



The alumni population are employed in over 115 different organisations (as listed in Annex B). There are larger numbers of alumni in specific RGC ministries: Ministry of Health (25); Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (24); Ministry of Economy and Finance (23); Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (19); Ministry of Environment (19); Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (13); Council of Ministers (13); and Ministry of Interior (11). Other organisations with larger number of alumni included the National Bank of Cambodia (17) and the Royal University of Phnom Penh (11).

Given the large overall number of employees in these ministries, it is perhaps unrealistic to expect that the Australian-trained alumni are sufficient in number to create a critical mass to influence significant changes, particularly if they are spread widely throughout a large ministry. For example there are 19 alumni amongst 2751 staff in the central ministry of the Ministry of Education (1315 staff with Masters degree in the central ministry and 73 with PhDs).¹⁴ To maximise the impact of

¹⁴ <http://www.moeys.gov.kh/images/moeys/indicator-and-statistic/192/hrmis-statistics-2011-2012.pdf>

the awards, **it is recommended that DFAT consider focusing the public category awards on specific target departments within individual ministries** (Recommendation 4). This will require the collection of alumni data on employing ministry and also department.

Civil society employers included the Cambodian Red Cross, Conservation International and Awareness Foundation. A range of private sector employers, including in banking, supermarkets and educational institutions, employed 23 respondents. The 18 respondents working in development organisations worked for the UNDP, ADB and Australian aid organisations (including in the Cambodia Agricultural Value Chain Program).

4 Skill and knowledge utilisation

4.1 Increased skills and capacity

The program objectives are to increase the skills and capacity of the men and women of Cambodia, including people with a disability and those from outside Phnom Penh.

The awards have undoubtedly increased the number of Cambodians with internationally recognised qualifications in Cambodia. As indicated above, 394 AAS, ALA and CMU alumni who between 1996 and 2013 completed their awards with postgraduate qualifications (including 94% with a Masters degree, 4% with a PhD). The majority of the alumni studied in the fields of: society and culture (30%), management and commerce (30%), health (12%), and agriculture and environment (11%). Although over time selected against a range of different criteria, 29 per cent of alumni had studied in current areas of priority identified by DFAT and the RGC, 21 per cent in cross-cutting and 50 per cent in other areas. Of the study undertaken by the 2009–2013 alumni, 60 per cent were in the priority/cross-cutting areas.

While there has been significant increase ($p < 0.01$) in the proportion of female alumni since the 1996–2003 period¹⁵, the proportion of awards offered to females is significantly lower (32%) than to males (68%) across the entire award period (see Table 6).

Table 6: Gender by award completion year (alumni population)

Completion year	Female %	Male %
1996–2003	18	82
2004–2008	41	59
2009–2013	38	62
Total	32	68

In line with DFAT policy on gender inclusion in its programs, **it is recommended that DFAT accelerate its initiatives to achieve gender equity in the offer of the awards** (Recommendation 1). In addition to specific promotions of the awards to females (particularly in areas of traditional male fields of study/employment), and working with key target organisations in identifying and encouraging females to apply for the scholarships, consideration should be given to requiring that 50 per cent of awards are made to females (assuming that the candidates meet other eligibility, language and university entrance criteria).

National data on people with disability is uncertain. The RGC estimate is that persons with disability comprise two per cent of the population; other sources believe it is closer to 20 per cent.¹⁶ Data on the disability of the alumni population was not available for the study. The Australia Awards Annual Report for 2013 states that no AAS were offered to people with disability in 2013. The report indicates that ‘while disappointing, it is not unexpected, given the limited educational and work opportunities available to persons with disability to meet the necessary academic prerequisites in the first instance’.

¹⁵ Noting that 44 per cent of AAS were awarded to females in 2014

¹⁶ Coffey (2014). Annual Report 2013 – Australia Awards Cambodia

Of the tracer survey respondents, six (3%) stated they had a disability (three reported a disability related to their legs and three other long-term medical disability). None of the respondents mentioned disability as a challenge during their studies. One of the alumni interviewed had a sight disability but had not needed specific adjustments during their studies. The alumni had, however, made use of their time in Australia to access treatment at their own expense, for a number of health issues that could not be treated in Cambodia. From the survey data provided, none of the alumni population appeared to be working in an organisation directly related to supporting people with a disability (although this may not be directly evident from examination of organisation names or alumni role titles and outputs).

More than 85 per cent of Cambodia's 14.8 million people live outside of Phnom Penh.¹⁷ However, the program's 2013 report states that, only 17 per cent of overall applications and 15 per cent of awards were offered in 2013 to provincial applicants outside of Phnom Penh. It is recognised that, even if originally from a provincial area, many alumni do not return to their home province after their award. Contact data on the alumni population indicates that only 8 per cent of the alumni were working/living in a provincial location in 2014. The alumni interviewed in Phnom Penh had all chosen to work there for the variety and level of job opportunities and the higher salaries available. Nevertheless, increasing the number of awards offered to provincial candidates might still be expected to increase the number of alumni that return to their province at some time after their award, or the number of alumni who use their employment in the capital city to contribute to their province's development. Some case studies illustrative of the contributions of provincial alumni are included in Annex G.

To meet the program's equity and inclusion objectives, it is **recommended that DFAT accelerate its initiatives to increase the proportion of award offers to candidates from provincial areas outside of Phnom Penh and from organisations supporting people with disability** (Recommendation 2). This could, for example, include working with target organisations to encourage their provincial staff to apply for awards, and working with Disabled Peoples Organisations or in health/education departments working in the disability sector to identify suitable candidates. As English language is reported to be a significant barrier to these target candidates meeting Australian university entrance criteria, specific training programs could be set up (potentially using the program's Equity Pathways Fund) to support their multiple year English language training pathways.

Not all of the increased skills and capacity are being directly used in Cambodia. Of the 394 alumni population, 14 per cent were recorded as living overseas. There was no difference in gender or by field of study of the proportion of alumni living overseas. The 1996-2003 alumni were significantly more likely ($p < 0.01$) to be recorded as living overseas (22%) than the more recent 2009-2013 cohort (5%). All but one of the 15 PhD alumni population were still living in Cambodia. Of the 8 per cent of the survey respondents (17 alumni) who reported living overseas, nine were living in Australia, two in France and the others in a range of countries. The main reasons stated by survey respondents for leaving Cambodia were to join family overseas (7 alumni), for a more stable environment (5 alumni), to undertake more study (3 alumni), and for employment-related reasons (11 alumni).

4.2 Reintegration – First employment after award studies

On conclusion of their studies, awardees are required to return to Cambodia and contribute to its development for at least two years. The tracer survey asked the recently graduated alumni (who completed their award between 2009–2013) about their employment experiences on returning to Cambodia. Of the 107 recently returned survey respondents, 76 per cent returned to work with the same employer as before their award. Respondents with a PhD were more likely to return to their same employer (92%) than those with a Masters degree (74%). Public category AAS were significantly more likely ($p < 0.01$) to return to their employer (98%) than open category respondents (37%). It is noted that while most public category alumni will have remained under public service

¹⁷ Coffey (2014). Annual Report 2013 – Australia Awards Cambodia

employment (and salaries) while on scholarship, the private and CSO/NGO sector alumni interviewed reported that they had to resign from their employment to take up the award.

As the 2009 tracer study found, re-integration into the workplace and the opportunity to utilise new skills and capacity effectively was the key barrier to skill utilisation for most returning (public sector) respondents (a summary comparison of the key 2009 and 2014 survey findings is provided in Annex D).

One of the interviewed public sector alumni returned to her previous department in the law/justice sector on award completion but found that the work was not satisfying and did not use her new skills and knowledge. She requested a transfer to another department and this was quickly approved. She is now sharing her time between working both in the government department and also providing high-level legal support to a critical case currently before the courts.

One of the survey respondents stated *"I was ignored by my original ministry's department where I was working before obtaining scholarship. I went back to work straight after completing my study. I was not even given a desk and chair to sit, let alone any work. I was so frustrated and left the work within 5 months to work for other government institution where my skills, knowledge and experienced was valued"*.

Another interviewed alumni returned to the same public sector ministry as before his award, but was transferred to the Human Resources Department where he could not utilise his IT/GIS skills. As he was not able to work in a relevant area, he decided to ask for suspension from his position and instead look for work in the private sector. As there are not many companies that can use his specialist experience, he had to move to a contract position in one of the provinces. He has been fortunate that his contract has been extended but would prefer permanent work. His new company has strong links with a Sydney university and he is often in contact with one of the professors there. Although it is a better work environment in the provinces, it makes it difficult to keep in touch with others in his field. There are also less opportunities to get a second job in the province and the roles are typically less well paid. He was unsure if he would return to his government job as the salary in the private sector was much higher.

Of the 25 survey respondents looking for work after their award, 16 (mainly open category alumni) spent three months or more before finding employment, and one respondent had not yet found work. Eleven of the respondents stated that they had difficulty in finding employment. The main reason given was the lack of relevant work experience in their degree field. Other reasons included: not many job opportunities at time of graduation; many applicants for the one position; many jobs not publicly advertised but given to friends and family; and recruitment did not always appear to merit based.

One alumni stated that *'80 per cent of job hunting depends on good networking, so that it is important that newly returned alumni are able to network with previous cohorts'*. Some of the interviewed alumni reported that they took the first job available on their return (typically short-term contracts with CSO/NGOs) and then traded up to more relevant, better-paid employment as opportunities became available. One interviewed female alumni who returned at the end of 2013 reported that she had taken over five months to find even contract work because of the highly competitive nature of recruitment in Cambodia. She had since found a five-month contract working for an Australian project in Cambodia. Another interviewed male alumni who also returned at the end of 2013 reported that he had had 20 different short-term consultancy jobs in 10 different CSO/NGOs (mainly international) and was still looking for a permanent position. Another interviewed alumni indicated that he had faced great difficulty in finding work as, although he had a Master's degree, he did not have much relevant work experience in his chosen field: *'my experience didn't match my qualification so applying for a job where I can use my skills is hard as they consider experience rather than degree'*.

It is recommended that consideration be given to additional support to alumni to find relevant employment on their return (Recommendation 3). This might, for example, include more systematically circulating names of new graduates to people from a similar field of study to create networking opportunities, advice on employment opportunities, and/or mentoring. Some alumni suggested an internship with an Australian company before returning home, or an

internship or priority being given to alumni to work on an Australian project in Cambodia, so they can have some work experience to put on their CV. Further consultation is also required with government departments to ensure relevant jobs are available for returning alumni.

Many of the 2009-2013 survey respondents reported were promoted to a higher position (44%) on returning to the same employer, with 52 per cent returning to the same position and 4 per cent to a lower position than before their scholarship. A higher proportion of female respondents reported returning to a higher position (52%) than before their award compared to male respondents (41%). However, open category respondents were significantly more likely ($p < 0.05$) to be promoted (73%) than those from the public category (38%).

Survey respondents were asked if they were still living in Cambodia and if not, the year in which they had left the country. There is no evidence that survey respondents have moved overseas before the end of the two-year return to work in Cambodia condition of the award. It is noted however that alumni who did not fulfil the return to work requirement are perhaps less likely to have completed the survey, or provided a valid answer to this section of the survey.

4.3 Current employment

Employment sector. Almost all of the survey respondents were currently working (96%). This compares very positively to data on employment outcomes of Australians and of international students who studied in Australia.¹⁸ Of the employed respondents, 64 per cent were currently employed in a public sector/state owned organisation, 11 per cent in a private company, 13 per cent in a CSO/NGO, 8 per cent in a donor agency and 3 per cent self-employed. Of the 132 respondents currently working in the public/state owned sector, 69 per cent were in government administration, 5 per cent in health services, and 15 per cent in a teaching institute. There was no difference in employment sector of survey respondents by award year or gender.

Of the nine respondents not working, three (all in the 2009–2013 cohort from the open category) reported having difficulty finding work due to lack of experience. The others were not looking for work due to family commitments, or undertaking further study or retired.

Second jobs. Of the respondents who were working, 90 per cent reported that they were working full-time, 6 per cent were working more than one job and 4 per cent working part-time. This data does not appear to reflect the alumni interviews where the majority reported undertaking more than one job (nor the 2009 survey where many of the respondents reported second jobs). It is likely that the question may need rewording or that respondents were reluctant to report second jobs (even when permission had been given) when they were in full-time employment in the public sector. This may be due to negative public perceptions of having a second job.¹⁹

One female alumni working at a senior level in an influential RCG agency reported that she was able to utilise her skills to influence the direction of national and sectoral policies and plans. She also had permission to teach at the Royal University of Phnom Penh where she said that she was able to transfer her experience to the younger generation and to help improve the quality of teaching at the university.

Job roles. A high proportion of the survey respondents are in (senior) managerial roles.

- Nearly half (47%) of the survey respondents are currently employed in (senior) managerial roles (e.g. CEO, Country Director, Deputy Director General, Counsellor, Vice-Chancellor, Vice-President).
- 38 per cent are in professional roles (e.g. Medical Officer, Lecturer, Inspection Officer, Audit Officer, Community Engagement Manager).

¹⁸ This employment data compares very positively with findings of the Graduate Careers Council of Australia 2013 Survey of Work and Study Outcomes of Recent Graduates. Of Masters coursework graduates in Australia, 82% were in full-time employment and 18% seeking full-time employment. Of the international student graduates (undergraduates and postgraduates) who had returned home, 56% were in employment and 44% were seeking full-time employment. Of the Vietnamese graduates only 55% were in employment.

¹⁹ One researcher comments that 'low-income conditions of public servants has led them to pay less attention to their tasks and duties, and to be involved in corruption and moonlighting in other jobs. As a result, public service delivery has suffered' (http://www.canberra.edu.au/researchrepository/file/5aea8cba-27ff-e2e7-d368-62bedc4f79bb/1/full_text.pdf).

- 15 per cent are in associate professional/clerical roles (e.g. Legal Assistant, Payroll Officer, Project Coordinator, Research Officer).

The career progression of alumni from professional (or technical/advisory) roles on award completion to managerial roles after a number of years back in Cambodia is shown in Table 7. There is a very significant difference ($p < 0.01$) between the proportion of 1996–2003 respondents who are managers (66%) compared with recent graduates (34%). Respondents in the public sector were significantly more likely ($p < 0.01$) than those in other sectors to be employed at the managerial level (57% of respondents in the public sector are managers, compared with 37% in the CSO and private sectors and only 5% in donor organisations). Of the 1996–2003 respondents in the public sector 78% are in a managerial role. A higher proportion of males were at the manager level (50%) compared to females (39%).

Table 7: Role level by award completion year (survey respondents)

Role level	1996–2003 %	2004–2008 %	2009–2013 %	Total %
Manager	66	50	34	47
Professional	25	37	47	38
Associate Professional/Clerical	9	13	19	15
Total	100	100	100	100

4.4 Career mobility

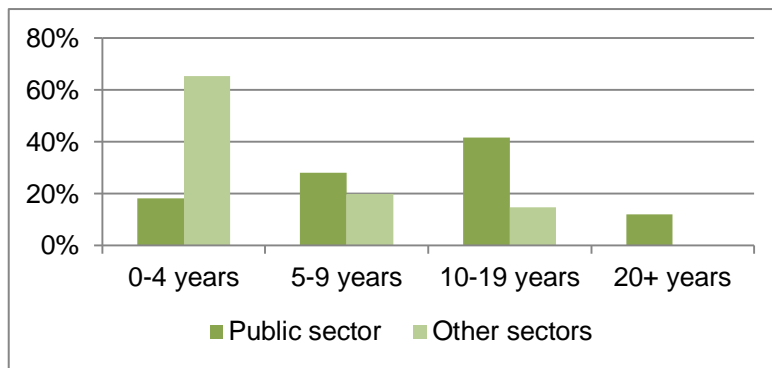
There is a mixed picture of career mobility. Newly returned survey respondents, particularly those from the open category were relatively mobile in their employment, whilst a significant proportion of earlier survey respondents, particularly those employed in the public sector were in more stable employment.

Table 8 shows that of the survey respondents 40 per cent have worked with their current employer for more than ten years. Not unsurprisingly the 1996–2003 respondents were significantly more likely ($p < 0.01$) to have worked with their current employer for more than ten years than the 2009–2013 respondents. Nevertheless 21% of the 1996–2003 respondents have changed employer within the past five years. There was no difference in overall career mobility by gender.

Table 8: Length of current employment by award completion year (survey respondents)

Current employment length	1996–2003	2004–2008	2009–2013	Total
0–4 years	21%	29%	46%	35%
5–9 years	25%	24%	26%	25%
10–19 years	38%	41%	24%	32%
20+ years	16%	6%	4%	8%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Figure 2 shows that survey respondents currently working in the public sector were significantly more likely ($p < 0.01$) to have worked at their organisation for ten years or more (54%) than those working in the other sectors (15%).

Figure 2: Length of current employment by employment sector

Although 69 per cent of the 2009–2013 survey respondents reported that at the time of the survey they were still working with the same first employer after their award, the others were more mobile. Public sector employees were significantly ($p < 0.01$) more likely to be with the same employer since their return from their award (87%) compared to those in the other sectors (49%). This difference in career mobility is likely to reflect the constraints of government bonding on their alumni and the short-term contract nature of much of the employment outside of the public sector. The interviewed alumni reported significant variation in their employer's requirements to remain with their organisation after their award. For example, the National Bank of Cambodia has a bond of seven years, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade five years, and the Ministry of Agriculture two years, while some Ministries have no bond. There was no significant difference in labour mobility of these newly returned respondents by gender.

Over half of the respondents who had found a new employer after their award were no longer with the same employer (compared to 74 per cent of those who had returned to the same employer). Of those respondents who had changed jobs, 46 per cent were with that employer for less than a year, and 24 per cent for one to two years before they changed jobs. Of survey respondents who had left their first employment after their award, 73 per cent did so due to limited opportunity to use their skills; 68 per cent to broaden their experience; and 51 per cent due to limited opportunities for promotion.

Overall, the majority of job movement is from the public sector to the other sectors - although over 90 per cent of awards were made to employees in the public sector, only 68 per cent of the alumni population are currently recorded as still working in that sector.

Career mobility was discussed with the interviewed alumni. The alumni advised that there was movement of alumni from the public to the CSO/NGO sectors (after completion of their employer bond obligations) to obtain higher salaries and increased job satisfaction and recognition through the opportunity to use their skills/knowledge and to broaden their experience. The alumni in government jobs prior to their award described valuing the stability of their employment combined with the opportunity to work in a second job to undertake more interesting/ productive tasks and/or to supplement the limited government salaries. The second jobs were typically in university teaching or CSO/NGO consultancies, although one alumni reported returning to his province to undertake private practice surgery at the weekends. With salary and job interest factors covered, a number of alumni reported being content to remain in the public sector, with the potential to apply for promotion over time.

The interviewed alumni working in CSO/NGOs valued their higher salaries (said to be 8–9 times higher than those in the public sector), the opportunity to work on interesting assignments, and in a positive and employee-valuing culture. For some alumni, the negative aspect of employment in CSO/NGOs was that it was typically on short-term contracts (depended on project funding) with the ongoing need to look for new assignments, and with breaks between employment.

4.5 Employment responsibilities

Alumni skills are being utilised by their current employers. Table 9 shows that 91 per cent of survey respondents reported greater technical/operational responsibilities compared to before their award; 80 per cent a greater role in policy development; and 72 per cent in a higher ranked position. Over 75 per cent of these respondents reported that this change was to a great or medium extent due to their award studies.

Not unsurprisingly given the length of time since their award, the 1996–2003 survey respondents were significantly ($p < 0.05$) more likely to be in higher ranked position compared to before their award (86%) than recent (64%) respondents. They were also more satisfied with their salary, as well as supervising more staff. Some recent alumni who were interviewed felt that it was hard to reach the decision-making roles as many people in these roles are in their late thirties and likely to stay there for life/until retirement, meaning a long wait for promotion and much competition. Others reported that promotion was not always given on merit but on networking/relationships and on agreeing with the leaders rather than challenging the status quo. Two alumni with PhDs were interviewed. There was mixed opinion as to the relative value of the PhD compared to a Masters qualification. In a competitive job market, having the higher-level qualification helped to gain employment, although many employers were looking for experience, not the degree level. They considered that having a PhD did result in a better reputation and also to having their views heard in the workplace.

Table 9: Changes in employment responsibilities

Responsibility	Change reported %	Extent change due to award studies %			
		To a great extent	To a medium extent	To a small extent	Not at all
Greater technical/operational responsibility	91	54	30	11	5
Greater role in policy development	80	40	34	19	6
Position ranked higher	72	39	37	14	9
Supervising more staff	68	33	32	19	16
More financial responsibility	66	28	38	15	19
More satisfied with their salary	54	29	32	21	18

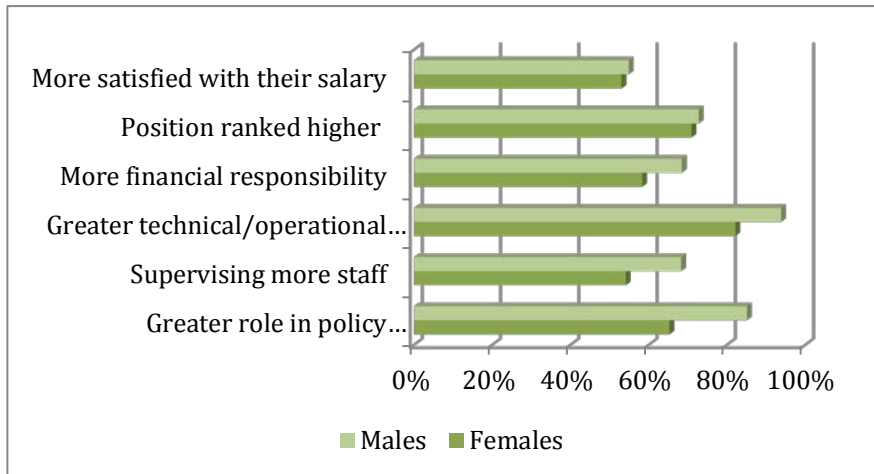
If respondents reported a change in their responsibilities, they were asked to state the extent to which this change was due to their award studies. Only for greater technical responsibility did over half of respondents (50%) considered that this change was due a great extent to the award. For many of the changes, more than a quarter of the respondents said they were only due to a small extent to the award or not at all.

Not all interviewed alumni were interested in being promoted to a 'political/decision-making' role above their professional/technical level, but were satisfied with being recognised for, and able to use, their skills/ knowledge. One interviewed alumni stated that '*regardless of the degree qualification, or institution, just the prestige of having been selected for an Australian scholarship (in the face of much competition) gave increased recognition in the workplace*'.

Another interviewed alumni indicated that she had no vision for being promoted. '*There is not much opportunity. To get work at a higher level you need to have political connections and be good at networking. I am cautious to apply for a promotion as there are so many barriers and how it may affect my work and personal life.*' Another said: '*I am not interested in promotion. I like my work environment. It is more important to me to be satisfied in my job and to be listened to at a technical level. I am included in meetings that are normally for people at a higher level because I have good technical skills and knowledge.*'

Data on differences between employer recognition of skills/knowledge for male and female alumni was mixed. There was no difference between gender as to whether a survey respondent had been promoted to a higher ranked position or salary satisfaction. As shown in Figure 3, male survey respondents reported significantly more ($p < 0.01$) positive employment outcomes in terms of supervising more staff and greater role in policy development

Figure 3: Changes in employment responsibilities by gender (survey respondents)



As reflected in the qualitative interviews, survey respondents in the public sector were significantly less likely ($p < 0.01$) to be satisfied with their salary (38%) compared to those working in the other sectors (82%). Survey respondents in the public sector were also significantly less likely ($p < 0.05$) to have increased financial responsibilities (59%) compared to those working in the other sectors (76%). There were no significant differences by sector in the level of technical/operational responsibility, or higher ranked position.

One of the female alumni interviewed reported that she had been promoted to a higher position just before her award and the government had kept her position open while she was away. She is able to use her skills extensively, including in an approved second job teaching at a local university at the weekends. She reported that there are few positions available at the higher level, but that she was well supported by her male supervisor, and believed that she would get fair consideration for any available vacancies.

Many of the female alumni interviewed indicated that they were very satisfied with their employment – including career fulfilment in that their skills were being positively recognised and utilised, equally to the male holders of postgraduate degrees. However, some agreed that a female had to work twice as hard as a man to be considered for the same promotional opportunities. Other female interviewees stated that in order to achieve work targets they sometimes had to compromise their family life and leisure time to complete their work. A number indicated that they had male bosses who were considerate of their family workloads and always checked before allocating additional tasks.

4.6 Skills and knowledge utilisation

For the scholarships to be effective, the knowledge and skills gained from the study in Australia have to be utilised in the workplace. Tracer survey respondents were asked 'How relevant do you think the technical content, knowledge and skills you gained during your scholarship are to your current job?' Of the 206 current employed respondents, over one half (53%) stated that the technical content, knowledge and skills gained during scholarship was highly relevant to their current job; 41 per cent reported that it was of some relevance and 6 per cent that it had very little or no relevance. Male respondents (61%) were significantly more likely than females (34%) to state that their skills/knowledge was highly relevant ($p < 0.01$). Respondents with PhDs were more

likely to be in work relevant to their studies (71%) than Masters graduates (53%), but this wasn't a significant difference due to the small number of PhD respondents.

The survey respondents and interviewed alumni reported that their award studies in Australia had also provided them with generic 'soft skills'. Table 10 shows that the most used skills were English language, analytical and critical thinking and other communication skills. Technical/subject matter skills and knowledge were only regularly used by 52 per cent of respondents. However male respondents were significantly more likely ($p < 0.01$) to report regular use of their technical skills and knowledge (60%) than females (32%). Male survey respondents were also significantly more likely ($p < 0.01$) to report regular use of their analytical and critical thinking (70%) than females (41%) There were no significant differences in skill utilisation by award completion year.

Table 10: Frequency of skill utilisation in current employment by skill type (survey respondents)

Skill type	Regularly (daily or weekly) %	Occasionally (monthly) %	Infrequently (a few times a year) %	Never %
English language skills	74	18	6	1
Analytical and critical thinking skills	64	27	8	1
Other communication skills	63	31	6	0
Management skills	57	29	11	3
Technical/subject matter skills and knowledge	52	31	16	2
Leadership skills	50	33	13	4
Cross-cultural skills	41	33	23	2

Many of the female alumni interviewed indicated that their study in Australia had given them a 'brave attitude' to contribute more to discussion and debate. They were now able to use their critical analysis skills to challenge their counterparts for more evidence-based decision-making. Living in Australia had also given them a 'new vision' for how they wanted Cambodia to develop – 'even if it may take twenty years or more'. One female alumni stated that the skills she gained from Australia 'gave me self-motivation to work in a professional manner and to act as a role model for other young women in Cambodia'. One interviewed alumni said that 'in technical matters, I now have the evidence and backing of a degree to be able to challenge approaches. At higher and political levels the issues are more sensitive and people are less open minded'.

Other survey respondents reported their most significant changes as individual benefits such as: better job, more recognition, higher salary and good working conditions. Some reported improved skills to contribute to their work including: management and communication skills; able to work with foreigner donors on proposal development and policy development; using English in communication; critical and analytical thinking in international context; more confidence and more influential at work; and knowledge and skill networks.

Half of the survey respondents (50%) reported regular use of the leadership skills gained during their scholarship. Only one third of the 16 ALA respondents (37%) reported regularly using their leadership skills compared to half of the AAS respondents (50%). Male respondents also reported regular use of leadership skills (54%) compared to female respondents (41%). More respondents in managerial roles reported regular use of leadership skills (61%) than those in professional (46%) or associate professional (26%) roles.

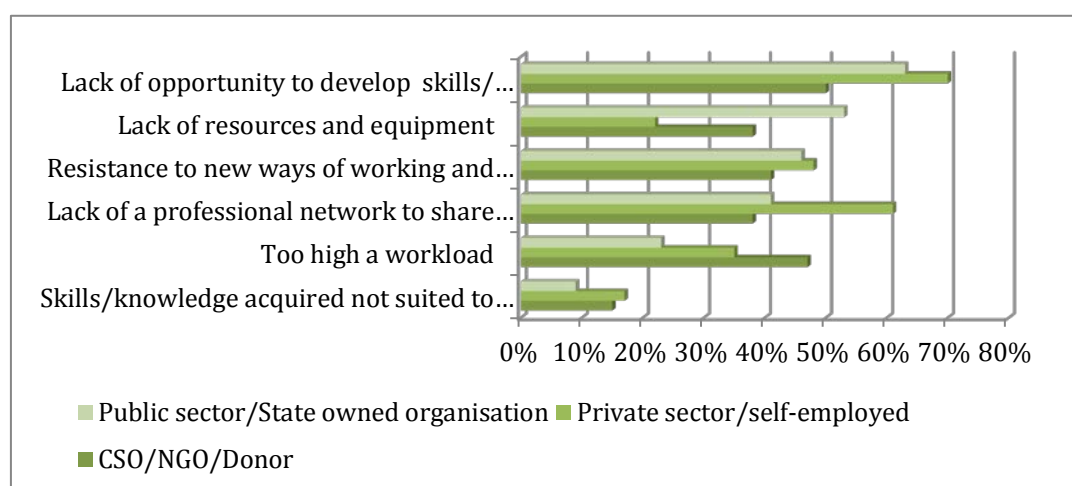
Of the respondents currently working, 86 per cent stated they had experienced difficulties in applying the skills/knowledge gained during their award. There was no significant difference in the reporting of difficulties in skill utilisation by gender, priority area of study and level of study. Respondents in the public sector (92%) reported significantly higher levels ($p < 0.01$) of difficulties in skill utilisation than those working in donor organisations (71%) and CSO/NGOs (75%). Recent alumni (91%) were significantly more likely ($p < 0.05$) to report difficulties than earlier alumni (73%);

as were alumni in associate professional/clerical roles (94%) compared to those in professional roles (79%).

Figure 4 shows that the main difficulties reported by the respondents in utilising their skills in their current employment were: the lack of opportunity to further develop skills/ knowledge (61%); lack of resources and equipment (46%); resistance to new ways of working and thinking (45%) and lack of a professional network to share ideas (43%).

Respondents also reported too high a workload (29%) and that the skills/knowledge acquired are not suited to their role (11%). There were no significant differences in difficulties experienced by gender, award completion year, or priority area of study.

Figure 4: Difficulties experienced in skill utilisation by current employment sector



Only 18 per cent of survey respondents stated that their employer had provided support to 'a great extent' in using their skills/knowledge, 40 per cent stating that the support had been 'to a medium extent'. Table 11 shows a significant difference ($p < 0.01$) between the employer support to great extent reported by male respondents (23%) compared to female respondents (7%). There was no significant difference in the level of reported employer support by the employment sector.

Table 8: Level of support received from supervisor in applying knowledge/ skills in current job by gender (survey respondents)

Level of support	Female %	Male %	Total %
A great extent	7	23	18
A medium extent	47	37	40
A small extent	34	32	33
None at all	12	7	9
Total	100	100	100

The data on skill utilisation, level of supervisor support, and difficulties experienced was analysed to determine whether there were any differences between major employers. However, the relatively small number of respondents for each employer meant that it was not possible to determine significant differences. Other approaches will be necessary to provide data on skill utilisation for discussion with major employers, and any assessment as to whether awards should continue to be offered to employees in the organisation.

Of the working survey respondents, one fifth (21%) stated that they had used their skills/knowledge outside of the workforce to a 'great extent' and 44 per cent to a medium extent. Examples of their contributions included: being a guest speaker at universities; policy advocacy to CSO/NGOs;

involvement in a sustainable natural resource management project; as a political leader in a rural province; supporting the work of the people in the community; and volunteering in CSO/NGOs. Male survey respondents (25%) were significantly more likely ($p < 0.05$) to report use of their skills outside of the workforce to a greater extent than females (10%). Conversely, recent survey respondents were significantly less likely ($p < 0.01$) to report use of their skills (to a great extent) outside of the workforce (16%) than the 1996-2013 respondents (39%).

4.7 Work outputs/research

The surveyed alumni provided examples of their work outputs, many of which are significant contributions to Cambodia's development. Examples of these include: AIDS epidemic modelling paper; Cambodian case investment report; audit report on foreign reserve investment; draft of country advocacy strategy plan; gender mainstreaming in agriculture guidelines; journal article on the facilitation of trade in Cambodia: challenges and possible solutions; research work on CSO/NGO board and governance in Cambodia; management information system for the local rice farm; and research paper on monitoring and evaluation of a health program.

Of the currently working respondents (mainly in the health and education sectors or undertaking second jobs doing research-related consultancies), 26 per cent have published research related to their scholarship area of study. Of these papers, 48 per cent were peer-reviewed and published in an international academic journal and 30 per cent in a national academic journal. Forty six per cent of published respondents had produced a paper as a sole author; 48 per cent had co-authored a paper with other Cambodians; 15 per cent had co-authored with Australians and 39 per cent had co-authored with other international authors.

Male respondents were significantly more likely ($p < 0.01$) to have already published (or expect to) a piece of research work relevant to their area of award studies (31%) than females (14%), as were ALA (47%) compared to ADS respondents (25%). Respondents in CSOs are more likely to be doing research (39%) than those in the public sector (23%). There was no difference in research activities by award completion year. Published research papers included work on: the situation of Cambodian migrant children workers in the Thai fishing industry; sea bass cage culture; key success for latrine uptake; youth participation in local governance; HIV/AIDS in Cambodia; business improvement and transformation solutions and business incubation program services; and the impact of economic land concession and directive land registration in Cambodia.

4.8 Skills and knowledge transfer

Only half of the respondents currently working (51%) reported that they had formally transferred (to a great extent) at least one of the technical/soft skills and knowledge learnt while undertaking the award. Table 12 shows the extent of formal skills and knowledge transfer by type of skill. The highest levels of formal skills transfer were of analytical and independent work/thinking skills. The majority of respondents reported that they had formally transferred (to a great or medium extent) their knowledge on the technical or subject matter relating to their course content (60%).

Male respondents were significantly more likely ($p < 0.01$) to transfer their technical skills and knowledge to a great/medium extent than women (66% compared to 44% respectively). The 1996-2003 graduates were significantly more likely ($p < 0.05$) to, a great or medium extent, transfer their skills (74%) than the 2009-2013 graduates (56%). There was no significant difference in skills transfer by employment sector, although management and professionals were more likely to report transferring their skills than associate professionals. It is likely that new graduates do not feel confident in transferring their skills and knowledge to others in their workplace, particularly to those who are more senior or older. It is therefore **recommended that the reintegration workshops provide training to newly returned graduates in skills/knowledge transfer and influencing change** (Recommendation 6).

Table 9: Extent of formal skills transfer in current employment by skill type (survey respondents)

Skill type	Not at all %	To a small extent %	To a medium extent %	To a great extent %
Independent work/thinking skills	18	18	31	33
Analytical skills	17	17	37	29
English language skills	20	24	29	27
Technical/subject matter related to course content	18	22	36	24
Leadership skills	18	25	33	23
Computer skills	23	33	29	15

A greater proportion of respondents (75%) transferred one or more of the skills gained whilst on award via informal than formal means. Table 13 shows the extent of informal skills and knowledge transfer by type, with the highest skill transfer being of communication, technical/subject matter and analytical skills. Many of the alumni interviewed reported formally transferring their skills through secondary employment as a university lecturer. Others reported transferring their skills in informal means in a voluntary capacity.

Table 10: Informal skills transfer in current employment by gender (survey respondents)

Skill type	Female (59 respondents) %	Male (150 respondents) %
Communication skills	76	72
Technical/subject matter related to course content	63	71
Analytical skills	58	71
English language skills	71	71
Leadership skills	51	67
Independent work/thinking skills	68	64
Research skills	51	55
Computer skills	46	43

4.9 Maintenance of linkages/networks formed during award

One of the program's objectives is to support the men and women of Cambodia to develop ongoing linkages with Australian people, organisations and institutions. Table 14 below shows the linkages maintained with Australia as reported by the survey respondents. The highest proportion of these alumni maintained (regular or occasional) linkages with other Cambodian AAS alumni (57%) and the former institution alumni association (31%). However, over one-third of respondents reported never having contact with local communities in Australia (48%), Australian students (40%), former institution staff and lecturers (39%), and AAS students from other countries (38%). Female respondents were more likely to have no contact with former institution staff (49%) than male respondents (35%). Males and females were equally likely to remain in contact with Australian students.

Table 11: Linkages with Australia by type of contact and frequency of contact (survey respondents)

Type of contact	Never %	Infrequently (a few times a year) %	Occasionally (monthly) %	Regularly (daily or weekly) %
Former institution lecturers and staff	39	40	17	5
Former institution alumni association	12	58	28	3
Australian students	40	37	17	6
Local communities in Australia	48	35	13	4
AAS students from Cambodia	4	40	44	13
AAS students from other countries	38	46	13	4

Survey respondents who completed their awards before 2008 were less likely to have maintained contact with Australian students (as shown in Table 15). The contacts they did maintain were mainly of a social nature via media such as Facebook. Of the 1996–2003 respondents, 54 per cent never had any contact with their Australian institution lecturers, compared to only 26 per cent of the 2009–2013 alumni.

The survey respondents reported that their linkages with Australian institutions had benefitted them for a range of reasons including to: be considered for any future sponsored PhD opportunities; discuss emerging issues at work; get funding for research project; receive advice and assistance for my work; seek feedback; exchange technical knowledge and to know what kind of opportunities that institution can offer; get up to date information about them; develop wider networks through professional referral; provide source of reference check; discuss project management; exchange ideas and knowledge relating to current responsibilities in workplace; ask advice on specific issue relating to my topic research subject.

Table 12: Maintenance of linkages with Australian students by award completion year (survey respondents)

Linkages with Australian students	1996–2003 %	2004–2008 %	2009–2013 %	Total %
Regularly (daily or weekly)	2	9	6	6
Occasionally (monthly)	8	13	24	17
Infrequently (a few times a year)	34	41	37	37
Never	56	37	33	40
Total	100	100	100	100

Given the overall weak linkages established while awardees are in Australia, **it is recommended that DFAT consider ways to improve the linkages made between Cambodian awardees and Australians while they are on award** (Recommendation 5). This could, for example, include DFAT/institutions arranging structured learning/social activities where the awardees meet with Australian students, such as those who will be participating in the New Colombo Plan or students with an interest in development activities.

AAA-C membership

The program's 2013 annual report notes that with DFAT's special focus on public diplomacy, the AAA-C has potential to help foster people-to-people links and reinforce the contribution that Australia makes to Cambodia's development. Of the survey respondents, 92 per cent reported that they were members of the Australia Alumni Association of Cambodia (AAA-C). The program's

2013 Annual Report indicated, however, that although in 2014, there were approximately 500 graduates who identified as members of the AAA-C, in mid-September 2014, there were only 123 financial members.²⁰ Seventeen survey respondents indicated that they were not members of the association for a range of reasons including that they live overseas, they are too busy, they do not want to pay membership fees, and that they are still to arrange membership.²¹

Many of the alumni expressed multiple reasons for being an AAA-C member. These reasons included: networking (59%); sharing and learning ideas and knowledge (49%); to give back to voluntary activities to help Cambodians in need (25%); for meeting old friends (22%); and to keep in touch with DFAT and Australia (11%). For example, survey respondents stated that that they were a member of the AAA-C to: build and maintain a professional network; get updated information and knowledge (including to be informed about the development in Cambodia and Australia); be part of an intellectual hub (or think tank) for sharing ideas and experience with other professionals from a similar background (and to help other alumni); pass on knowledge to other Cambodians who do not have opportunity for higher education; share work and business opportunities; learn more on current academic research developments; attend workshops where experts from different fields share their knowledge and experience; keep in contact with, and make new friends; attend social functions and activities; contribute to community and charity activities to help the impoverished in Cambodia; promote study in Australia; to motivate others to strive for an Australian scholarship and to advance the AAS brand as one of the flagship scholarships; and to get a discount for their children to study English at the Australian College of English.

Linkages with Australian organisations in Cambodia

Almost one-third of respondents (32%) currently have contact with at least one Australian organisation in Cambodia. These respondents reported having contact with the Australian Embassy (15) and working in an Australian funded project (14), such as the Cambodian Agricultural Value Chain Program (CAVAC). Other respondents (19) have had contact in Cambodia with Australian organisations, such as the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research, Australian universities, Fred Hollows Foundation, Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) and the Australian Defence Office.

The AAA-C activities help alumni to keep in touch and share knowledge and experience. However, to support full achievement of the program objectives, to sustain established linkages with Australia, and to create new ones, **it is recommended that the AAA-C deliver a strong program of activities that connect alumni to Australian organisations and individuals** (Recommendation 8). This may include for example arranging special interest group meetings with academics and researchers visiting Cambodia, encouraging Australian universities to arrange mentoring for their alumni and encouraging Australian organisations in Cambodia to provide work-experience for newly alumni.

Alumni were asked what services they want the AAA-C to provide. The responses were summed up by one alumni as *'a platform to network, share knowledge, experience, access to employment opportunities (inside and outside Cambodia) and to contribute to the country's development'*. Annex C lists the services requested by respondents, including to provide: support to awardees; reintegration services for new alumni; social and networking functions; employment support; professional development training; other professional development resources; debate forum; research support; business advice; community service activities; and scholarship updates.

The alumni interviewed emphasised the need for the AAA-C or DFAT to provide reintegration/employment support for new returnees; to provide special interest groups for people in the same profession which would help alumni to network, share experience, skills and knowledge, and hear about job opportunities. Several of these alumni also requested professional development in generic areas, such as leadership training and managing staff performance.

²⁰ Coffey (2014). Annual Report 2013 – Australia Awards Cambodia

²¹ This validates data from the 2014 Alumni Engagement Survey conducted by the Managing Contractor where some alumni reported that they "do not have any spare time to be involved in a voluntary organisation". However, unlike the Engagement Survey, none of the survey respondents stated that they "did not have any interest in maintaining contact with other graduates of Australia Awards".

4.10 Overall contribution of awards to Cambodia's development

Determining the contribution of the awards to Cambodia's development is complex. It would not only require an assessment of the impact of outputs, research and other alumni contributions but also measuring the relative (positive or negative) contribution of the award compared to other factors, such as the contribution of others, the influence of other long and short-term training, alumni personal motivations and networks. This is beyond the scope of the current study.

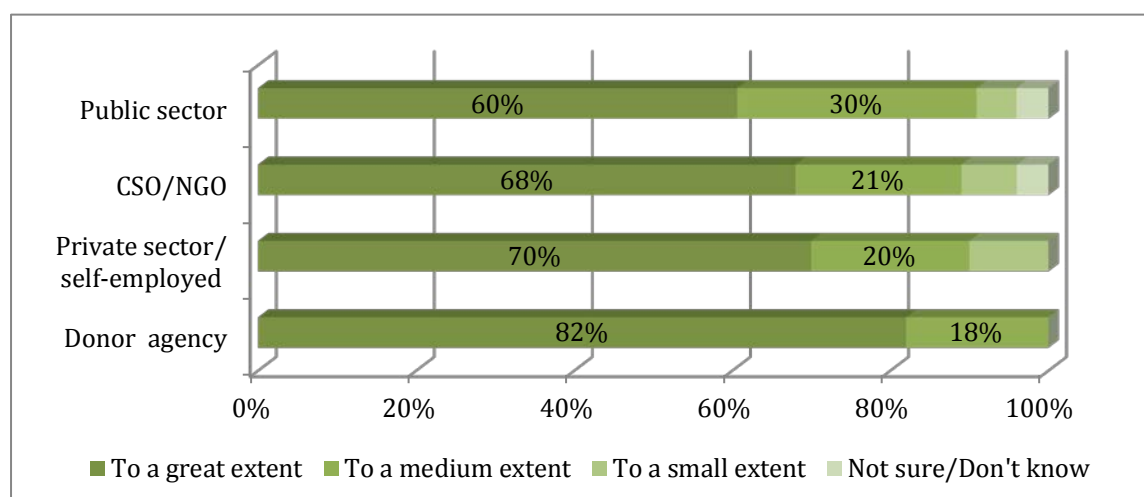
Tracer survey alumni were, however, asked to assess the extent to which their award had been used for Cambodia's development.²² As shown in Table 16, 65 per cent survey respondents considered that their award has been utilised for Cambodia's development 'to a great extent', 26 per cent 'to a medium extent' and 6 per cent to 'a small extent'. Earlier alumni were significantly more likely ($p < 0.05$) to say their award had been utilised to a great extent (77%) than recent alumni (60%). Respondents studying in a priority area were significantly more likely ($p < 0.05$) to say their award had been utilised to a great extent (72%) than those studying in other areas (57%). Overseas residents were less likely to state that say their award had been utilised to a great extent (56%) than those in Cambodia (65%), although this was not a significant difference.

Table 13: Extent scholarship has contributed to Cambodia's development by award completion year (survey respondents)

Extent	1996–2003 %	2004–2008 %	2009–2013 %	Total %
To a great extent	77	60	60	65
To a medium extent	20	30	28	26
To a small extent	2	6	8	6
Not sure/Don't know	2	4	3	3
Total	100	100	100	100

Figure 5 shows that a higher proportion of survey respondents employed in donor agencies (79%), private sector/self-employed (70%) and CSO/NGO (68%) considered that their award had contributed to Cambodia's development than those employed in the public sector (60%).

Figure 5: Extent scholarship has contributed to Cambodia's development by current employment sector



²² In future program M&E, this data should be triangulated with supervisor/employer views on the impact of the alumni contributions

Survey respondents reported that the most significant change that had occurred since completing the award was their capacity to contribute to Cambodian national development. Examples include: providing policy and project advice on climate change, natural resource management, and local livelihoods; sharing knowledge with youth through university lecturing and forum; better knowledge to handle public health strategies in Cambodia; improved capacity and skill to meet free-market economy; proper knowledge on business and international trade; contributing to the young activist movement of Cambodia; chairperson of a community organisation; and being in a position to help change the education system in Cambodia.

Challenges

Although the alumni expressed mainly positive outlooks with regard to their contribution to Cambodia's development, some expressed concern as to the extent to which their work outputs would be used to result in change in Cambodia. A barrier raised by many alumni was the entrenched views and conservatism of decision-makers within government. One alumni stated that *'senior officials are not willing to accept new ideas as they might view it as an obstacle for them to perform their traditional practice'*. Another of the interviewed alumni reported that at her reintegration workshop she had been advised to keep her profile as low as possible. Instead, she had found that it was more effective to influence change by being a *'good observer and researcher of workplace trends and behaviours of co-workers'* in order to time how and when to suggest change. Another interviewed alumni stated that *'in my workplace many of the staff, including my bosses have trained overseas and are already open-minded to consider new approaches'*.

Other interviewed alumni mentioned a hierarchical management style and lengthy bureaucratic processes. For example, one noted the *'lack of support and commitment from top management' and that 'bureaucracy still exists in working environment'*. Another said that by the time their work was approved, the evidence on which it was based was long outdated.

Corruption remains prominent at all levels and across all sectors in Cambodia, including the public sector.²³ Some interviewed alumni reported that their outputs were only likely to be used if it met with the political and/or financial interests of the decision-makers. One survey respondent stated that *'corruption, nepotism and social injustice are still the main obstacles for me to apply the knowledge and skills that I have gained from my course of study'*.

Many of the alumni interviewed considered that it was necessary to work in the CSO/NGO or private sector in order to be able to implement new ideas. One alumni stated that *'in government only the very top, political level can make decisions – in CSOs, all levels have a more equal chance, if they have the expertise'*. Another commented: *'I experienced difficulty in using my skills within government, particularly on sensitive issues such as human and land rights. So I changed to work in an NGO where I can demonstrate my leadership and influence change through actively promoting dialogue with the government.'*

Another interviewed alumni suggested that change could be better effected where there were a number of AAS alumni to support each other. She quoted a proverb *'they can break one chopstick but they can't break a bunch of chopsticks'*.

It is recommended that DFAT prioritise a proportion of the awards to Cambodians working in organisations that are able to demonstrate that they both support the alumni to utilise their skills/knowledge and also that alumni outputs are utilised to contribute to Cambodia's development (Recommendation 4). This would require more in-depth organisational understanding than possible in this study of which employers are supporting alumni to integrate, utilise their skills and implement the policies, processes etc. developed. The program should also continue its work with (particularly public sector) employers regarding improving reintegration support for alumni on their return to their organisation.

²³ In 2014, Cambodia ranked 156 from 175 countries with a corruption ranking of 21 (scale 0 highly corrupt to 100 very clean). Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index. <http://www.transparency.org/cpi2014/results>

It is noted that some of the alumni (14%) are living outside of Cambodia, some on a temporary basis. The length of time these alumni spend overseas and the extent to which these alumni are continuing to contribute to Cambodia (through, for example, sending remittances to Cambodia, gaining additional work experience to bring back to the country, representing Cambodia overseas, and undertaking further study) was not collected as part of this study.

Given the proportion of overseas alumni, it is recommended that future program M&E include a study on the extent to which overseas alumni make an ongoing contribution to Cambodia's development (Recommendation 13).

Annex G contains some alumni case studies that illustrate their employment experiences on returning to Cambodia after their award and in contributing to its development.

4.11 Alumni recommendations

When asked to make recommendations to improve the program, most respondents were satisfied with their experiences in Australia, with 48 per cent having no recommendations to make, saying the program was already good and expressing appreciation for their award. Over one-third of respondents (35%) made recommendations to increase the number of awards available in total and/or for specific target groups. There was a range of contrasting views, however, as to which awardees should be targeted: undergraduates or PhDs; public or private sector; specific technical areas; a focus on awards for the disadvantaged; or providing a follow-on award (or short-course training) for those who have already successfully completed their scholarship.

As listed in Annex C, alumni recommendations were also made regarding:

- the pre-award processes (selection, English language requirements, pre-departure training and briefing), such as: 'It would be good if you select potential candidates for the English language program which they can study part time while they also can work to earn for family'; 'Suitable monthly stipend should be given to successful candidates during their pre-departure program in Cambodia'
- on-award support (particularly for families) such as: 'Can Australian scholarships program provide some allowance to the spouse of scholarship holder as before'; 'More support in finding permanent accommodation should be provided to candidates whose families join in Australia'; 'There should be a some field research activities with some amount of budget for Master students who have a research program. This can help students to explore deeply about topic and can compare literature review with practical experience'
- reintegration (especially requests for internships, mentoring and finding post-award employment) such as: 'There are so many job announcements from the DFAT or Australian Government, but sometimes returnees are not given the priority or opportunity'; 'It is better to follow up with the ministry to encourage their staff to work for their workplace and have a promotion policy'; 'Provide dynamic support for returnees'; 'After graduation, allow the students to work in Australia for a few years before coming back to Cambodia. Great opportunities to have mentoring opportunities, and develop practical skill from working'.

5 Perceptions of Australia

This section presents data on perceptions of international and Cambodian students on Australia and its education systems compared to other international study destinations.

5.1 Alumni perspectives

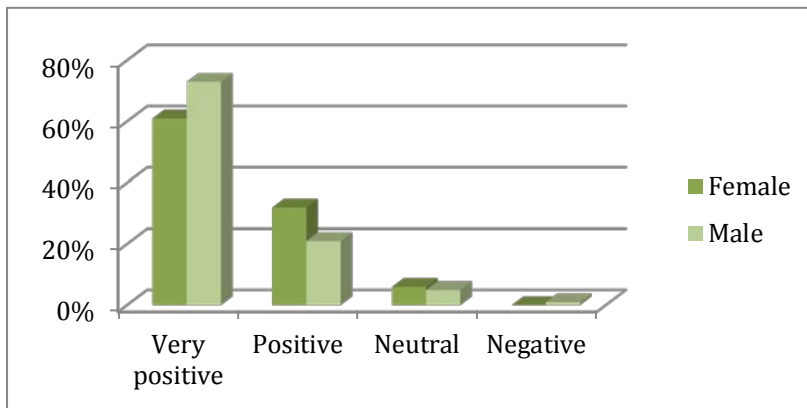
In addition to the standard tracer survey questions for AAS, the Cambodian survey respondents were asked additional questions on their perceptions of Australian education. During the qualitative interviews, alumni were asked about their impressions of Australia compared to other countries.

5.1.1 Impressions of Australia

Overall, 70 per cent of respondents reported a very positive impression and 24 per cent a positive impression of Australia. As shown in Figure 6, females were less likely to have a very positive

impression (61%) than male respondents (73%). There was no significant difference in impressions by award year, priority area of study, or current employment.

Figure 6: Overall impression of Australia by gender (survey respondents)



Positive impressions

Alumni were asked for their most positive and negative impressions of Australia. Many survey respondents mentioned multiple positive impressions. The most frequently mentioned positive impression (by 35 per cent of respondents) was that Australia was a developed country, democratic and a good legal and welfare system. Australia's people being friendly, helpful and nice was mentioned by 26 per cent of respondents. Respondents also mentioned the quality of Australia's education (22%), the safe and peaceful study environment (11%), Australia's support for Cambodia's development (9%) and the multicultural environment (10%).

One survey respondent stated that: *'One of the outstanding advantages of the Australian scholarships program for Cambodia is the improved research/writing capacity of the recipients of the scholarship. All students have their English writing and research skills improved, more or less, during their study in Australia. This plays a crucial role in contributing to cultivate research culture in Cambodia. The question here is how we as alumni can continue to improve and sharpen this research skill that we have gained from Australia so that we can contribute more meaningfully in encouraging evidence-based policy-making to develop Cambodia.'*

The alumni interviewed were asked if their scholarship and living in Australia meet their expectations. Almost all answered highly positively, stating that their award had met or exceeded all their expectations in terms of the quality of education received and their experiences living outside of Cambodia. All of the interviewed alumni valued the multicultural aspect of Australia – the opportunity to not only meet with Australians but also with a wide range of nationalities. Two of the interviewed alumni expressed disappointment that their course did not cover all the areas that they had expected or that their course had not enabled them to do any study or research with a Cambodian context.

Three of the alumni interviewed had their families join them in Australia and greatly valued this opportunity, including that their spouse was allowed to work to cover the additional costs faced. They said that their spouse and school-aged children had greatly benefitted from the school environment and the English language skills learned. The son of one alumni had problems with speech delay and they were able to get professional support that was not available in Cambodia. A few alumni said that they were saving up to support their children to return to study in Australia at the undergraduate level. A number of alumni did, however, comment on the difficulty of making health and school arrangements for their children and their frustration that the university and others were not willing to help them.

Only two ALA alumni were able to be interviewed as part of the study, so their views may not be representative. In terms of the leadership component of the ALA program, they both felt it had

overall value but that it did not fully meet their expectations as they felt it was very theoretical with insufficient practical examples.²⁴

A number of alumni identified that undertaking research activities in Australia was particularly challenging as their undergraduate training in Cambodia had not included any education in research methodologies and undertaking research. This had resulted in considerable difficulties for them (and delays) in the preparation of their initial research plans for their studies.

It is recommended that the pre-departure training be reviewed to determine whether it can be strengthened to better prepare awardees for conducting research in Australia (Recommendation 11).

Negative impressions

Only a small percentage of survey respondents (14%) reported negative impact from their award. The major negative impact was on family life (19 alumni), professional life (6 alumni) and on the alumni's organisation (5 alumni). One interviewed alumni, who took more than six months to find work, became dispirited and their families began to openly question the financial risk of taking a scholarship. Given the small respondent numbers, there were no significant differences in the types of negative impact reported by gender or award completion year, however, recent alumni were more likely to report a negative impact (17%) than the 1996–2003 alumni (11%).

Although only one of the survey respondents reported an overall negative impression of Australia, and 12 were neutral in their views, 95 respondents (45%) cited some negative impressions. Recent alumni were more likely to mention (or remember) these negatives (54%) than those from 1996–2003 (31%). The most frequently mentioned negative impression was discrimination/racism (41%) and the weather (13%). Other negative impressions mentioned (in descending order) related to scholarships policy/the pre-departure training, the cost of living, crime/drugs, leaving their family, returning home, Australia's policy on refugees, the study program, settling family into Australia and difficulty in making friends.

This negative impression of discrimination/racism in Australia reflects the response by Cambodian students to DFAT's Ongoing Awardee Survey in 2013, where 40 per cent of ongoing students reported that they had experienced some form of discrimination during their time in Australia. This rate was considerably higher than compared with the 29 per cent reported by awardees across all countries. In the DFAT Ongoing Awardee Survey, 82 per cent of Cambodian awardees said it affected them 'a little' and 9 per cent 'a lot' (compared to 57% and 8% respectively for all AAS awardees).

Given this survey finding, the focus group alumni were asked about their experience with racism/discrimination in Australia. One interviewed alumni was of the view that she had had lecturers who marked the international students lower, although she acknowledged that this may have been due to weaker English language skills. Another reported that he had experienced difficulties in working in groups with Australians who would not listen to the international students (even when discussing development issues).

It is recommended that the pre-departure training on discrimination be reviewed to determine whether it can be strengthened to better help Cambodian awardees address any discrimination while in Australia (Recommendation 9).

Additional data from the DFAT Ongoing Awardees Survey identified that 91 per cent of Cambodian alumni respondents were satisfied/very satisfied with the entitlements and other assistance provided under the awards. The challenges faced by Cambodian respondents were: pre-requisite requirements for the current study (91%); general study skills (88%); understanding English (83%); and participating in class discussions (84%). Of the awardees in Australia, 44 per cent mentioned severe/major problem with finding part-time employment.

²⁴ This reflected the DFAT Ongoing Awardee survey for 2013 where 67 per cent of the Cambodians reported that the leadership program met expectations (compared with 84% for all awardees).

The awardees were also asked which issues caused problems in Australia – 14 per cent of respondents said accessing health services; 15 per cent arranging childcare; 15 per cent finding accommodation; and 5 per cent bringing partner/children to Australia.

5.1.2 Comparisons with other study countries

All but one of 206 survey respondents reported that they would recommend Australia as a higher education study destination. Alumni were asked in which other countries they had studied and their relative impressions between Australia and their other study countries. Almost half (47 per cent) had also had study experience (long and/or short-term) in countries other than Australia. Many of the alumni had studied in more than one country. The highest number of alumni had studied in the USA (30), Thailand (28), Philippines (15) and Russia (12). Other alumni had also studied in England, France, Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam.

Of the alumni who had studied in countries other than Australia, 93 per cent were sponsored to undertake the study through a range of sponsors, including the Government of Cambodia, foreign governments/aid agencies, multilateral agencies and, to a lesser extent, private companies and overseas universities.

Table 17 shows the responses when the survey respondents were asked to compare Australia with other study countries with respect to some key factors affecting location study decisions. The quality of education, student support services, safe place to live and welcome to international students in Australia were all considered favourably compared to other countries. Alumni were, however, less positive with respect to the cost of tuition fees and cost of living in Australia.

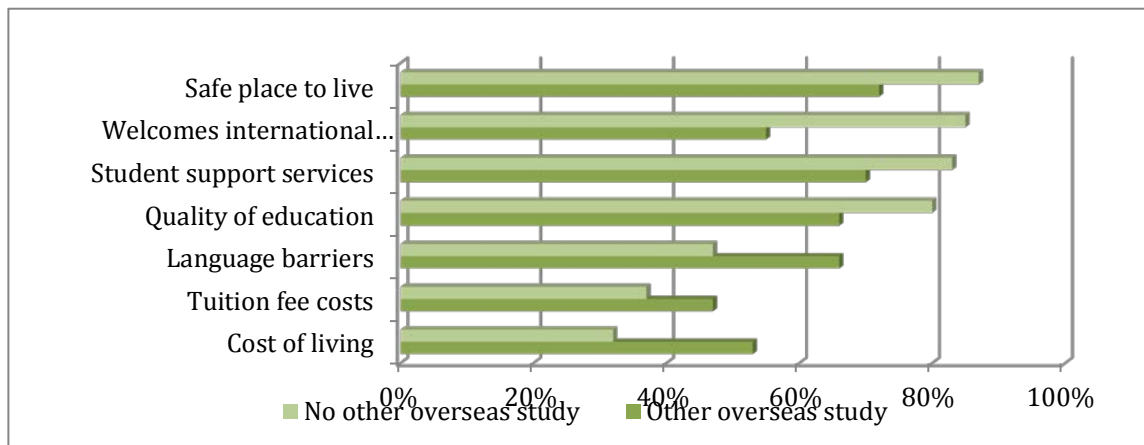
Table 14: Comparison of Australia with other study countries (survey respondents)

Comparison factor	Australia is better %	The same %	Australia is not as good %
Safe place to live	79	19	2
Student support services	75	21	4
Quality of education	72	26	3
Welcomes international students	68	28	3
Language barriers	58	42	1
Cost of living	45	21	34
Tuition fee costs	42	29	29

Figure 7 shows that the survey respondents who had studied in other countries besides Australia had a lower overall rating of Australia than the respondents with no other overseas experience. The exception for this was on the factors of the cost of living and tuition fee costs.

The alumni interviewed indicated a range of reasons for preferring to study in Australia compared to other countries. This included that Australia was: English speaking; that although the Australian universities are not in the very top ranked in the world, they still have a very good reputation and are well recognised in the workplace; the health system is very good; the weather is not as cold as Europe; the food is more compatible with Cambodia; there are existing networks with relatives and friends already living in Australia; travel costs are cheaper as Australia is closer; and unlike some other awards, families are also allowed to travel to Australia and benefit from the education, health system and overall experiences.

Figure 7: Comparison of Australia with other study countries by overseas study experience (survey respondents)



Family entry to Australia was considered by the surveyed and interviewed alumni as one of the comparative advantages of the AAS program, which broadens and strengthens the public diplomacy outcomes. To maximise this impact, DFAT and the Managing Contractor should continue to monitor awardee satisfaction with the support provided to help awardees to establish their families who accompany them while on-award in Australia.

A small number of alumni interviewed thought that although Australia had a good reputation, if undertaking their PhD they would prefer to study in Europe or USA to gain new experiences in a different study environment. Some mentioned Canada as a preferred study destination due to its freer residency rights. Another alumni said that while he would highly recommend Australia as a place of study, there were universities in Europe that would better meet his PhD study needs.

One survey respondent stated that *'the English requirement for studying in Australia is higher compared to other countries. It is an IELTS 6.5 for Australia, but for UK and other countries just 5.5. The cost of taking IELTS is very high for Cambodian people'*.

Another survey respondent stated that *'more and more Cambodian scholars come from Japan and many of them are holding higher position in government as well as in other research institutions. Japanese scholarships provide more room for their alumni to get their PhD degree after they finish their Master program. Therefore, many of them have more chance to hold higher positions in both public and private institutions'*.

5.2 Perspectives of Australian scholarships

Comprehensive and up-to-date information on other scholarships available for Cambodians to undertake tertiary education overseas is difficult to obtain, particularly on those scholarships offered, or managed directly, by the RGC. Internet research did not identify any scholarship schemes as large as that of the Australia Awards. Other scholarship schemes offered for Cambodians include those offered by New Zealand (30 postgraduate awards per annum), France (32 postgraduate per annum), Erasmus Mundus (for study in European Union countries), Japan (24 per year, Masters in English), Germany/DAAD, USA (Fulbright) and China (56 in 2014 bachelor and postgraduate). Some initial information on these awards is provided in Annex E.

A small number of scholarships are also offered by individual tertiary institutions, for example the National University of Singapore, the Thammasat University in Thailand as well as some Australian universities.

The 2013 DFAT On-Award Survey data for new arrivals of Cambodia AAS demonstrated the competition for high quality awardees in that the majority of awardees had also applied for another scholarship – 25 per cent of respondents had applied for another scholarship with Japan, 42 per cent for a New Zealand ASEAN Scholars Award and 17 per cent for a German/DAAD scholarship.

While these respondents accepted the Australian scholarship, others did not. The DFAT Post asked the study team to undertake additional analysis as to why a small number of Cambodians who were offered an AAS, instead accepted a scholarship to study in another country.

Three Cambodians (two female and one male) who were offered awards for commencement in 2014 withdrew after being offered a scholarship by another country (one in Portugal under an Erasmus scholarship, one in Singapore sponsored by a university and one not stated). These students were asked a small number of questions by email. All three students were already being considered for another scholarship at the time they applied for the AAS. Acceptance of the other scholarship was primarily a consideration of timing, with a longer lead-time for the AAS, and a decision to accept the first scholarship offered rather than face the uncertainty of not being offered an AAS. The alumni suggested that the AAS would be improved through expediting the selection procedures.

All three students regretted, in part, not being able to study in Australia. One student said *'Actually, Australia is my first choice of study destination. Thus, I also have some regret for not proceeding to study in Australia since it is one of the most prestigious world-class opportunities'*. Another said that *'I do believe that the system and quality of education in Australia is better than here and that would be the one thing I long for. Also, I believe those classes are conducted in English which would be best for me. I would love to try applying for PhD in Australia though. So let's see what the future could bring'*. The third said *'I do acknowledge that there are pros and cons of my current choice. I will be strong academically in the course I am doing, yet I think I will gain more knowledge and culture in addition to the Australian academic curriculum if I am able to accept the AAS...It is heart aching to not being able to be part of this program, especially a strong alumni network that I can possibly tap onto after completion of the program'*.

Pre-departure withdrawals

To gain additional insights into the 'attractiveness' to Cambodians of the Australia Awards, three candidates (all male) who had withdrawn after being offered an AAS in 2014 were interviewed by the Research Assistant. All three candidates cited financial reasons for dropping out. One candidate advised that *'because the pre-departure training will take at least six to nine months, I cannot live on this little stipend...only rich candidates are willing to take this opportunity as they don't have to support family'*. Another candidate could not afford to move from their province to live in Phnom Penh and suggested that IELTS training should also be offered in the provinces.²⁵

All three AAS candidates interviewed were continuing to work to support their families while improving their English ability with the aim of reaching the required IELTS level independently so that they could apply again in the future, but would not need to spend so long doing the pre-departure training. One alumni stated that *'he wanted to make sure that he was well prepared and also that his family financial status was stable...he hoped to apply again in 2015 as Australian education is recognised worldwide, so that he would be able to work as a consultant on completion of his studies which was more secure than working in an NGO'*.

One of these candidates was also offered a new position after having accepted the AAS. After discussion with some AAS alumni about the challenges of job competition and relative benefits on their return from their studies, he decided to accept the job (and withdrew from the AAS) as it had a salary comparable to what he could obtain even with a Masters degree.

Some alumni also addressed the challenges of the pre-departure training in their tracer survey recommendations. One survey respondent suggested that *'it would be good if you select potential candidates for the English language program which they can study part time while they also can work to earn for family. After a few month of this program, awardees who reach the required university standard can then study the departure program full time'*. Another recommended that a *'suitable monthly stipend should be given to successful candidates during their pre-departure program in Cambodia'*.

²⁵ This perspective mirrors the statement in the program's 2013 Annual Report that indicates that "each year there is attrition from PDT courses, mainly for financial reasons. Awardees receive a monthly stipend and many, especially those from the Open Category, find it difficult to meet commitments"

This feedback, albeit from a small number of cases, triangulates findings from the Australia Awards Cambodia Annual Report 2014 that 'each year there is attrition from the pre-departure course, mainly for financial reasons'. **It is therefore recommended that the level of the pre-departure training stipend be reviewed for financially disadvantaged students** (Recommendation 10).

5.3 International student perspectives

5.3.1 International students in Australia

Australia is an attractive overseas study destination for international students. International students are attracted by the excellence of its education and training, its world's best practice quality and financial assurances, national qualifications framework and the welcoming environment of its technologically advanced, safe, multicultural society.²⁶ It ranks third in the English-speaking world behind the United States and the United Kingdom as an international student destination. Of the overseas higher education students worldwide in 2012, 6 per cent study in Australia, behind the USA 19 per cent, the UK 11 per cent, China 8 per cent, and France 7 per cent.²⁷

A range of studies has analysed the factors considered by international students when selecting their overseas study destination (see Annex F). Much of this analysis has centred around full-fee paying students from key international student markets worldwide, not including Cambodia.²⁸ These study findings included that:

- alumni and prospective students from China, Indonesia, Korea, Vietnam and Indonesia all indicated that quality of education and the cost of tuition were the two most important factors affecting student choice. Students from Thailand placed cost of living, cost of tuition and safety all above the quality of education²⁹
- the top five reasons to study abroad for prospective students were for a better quality education, to improve career prospects, experience living abroad and foreign culture, to improve their English language and to broaden their view on life/globally³⁰
- subject/course rankings are more important in student decision-making than institution rankings. It was recommended that country-level messaging reinforcing welcome and safety of international students will support institutional marketing³¹
- the top factors in decision-making (in order) included: teaching quality, qualification recognition, institution reputation, reputation of education system, research quality³²
- many students chose a study destination that is culturally familiar, considered to be safe and of low risk. Reasons put forward by Asian students who had chosen to study in Malaysia were: the proximity to their own country, sharing the same culture, and the reasonableness of tuition and living costs.³³

The 2012 Australian Education International (AEI) report on the study choices for six countries concluded that not all international students are the same, and understanding their differences can make a big difference to results. Caution in extrapolating this data for Cambodian sponsored students (and for understanding differences between private and public sector applicants) is therefore required.

²⁶ www.studyinaustralia.gov.au

²⁷ Steve Nerlich (2014). Australia International Education Conference 2014. Project Atlas 2012

²⁸ Given the small size of the international student market, AEI has not developed a Market Information Package on Cambodia

²⁹ AEI (2012). Studying in Australia: Views from six key countries.

³⁰ IDP's presentation at the 2014 Australian International Education Conference

³¹ Hobson (2014). Beyond the data: influencing international student decision-making. May 2014

³² Group of Eight Australia (2014), Backgrounder. International student motivations. September 2014

³³ Singh et al (2013). The importance of place for international student's choice of university: a Malaysian case study. HERDSA Annual Conference, 2013

As AAS awardees have tuition fees, visas and travel paid for, and are required to return to their home countries after their award, the study choice factors from the above findings that may be relevant to Cambodian scholarship applicants are: quality of education, a peaceful and safe study environment, the opportunity to bring their families to Australia, and opportunities to work (for awardees who need to supplement their scholarship allowances, or who have spouses who wish to work in Australia).

5.3.2 Cambodians in Australia

Demand for education services in Cambodia is very high, as the majority of the population is still school-age and many Cambodian's recognise the importance of education in securing better employment opportunities. An estimated USD 32 million will be spent on overseas education by Cambodians in 2014, of which an estimated 55 per cent is spent in the United States. This has grown considerably since the 2012 estimate of USD 23 million.³⁴

Full-fee paying Cambodians who have studied in Australia are a potential source of networks for returning AAS alumni, to share their connections and build on their affiliation with Australia and their common skills/knowledge.

There is a relatively small but growing number of Cambodians studying in Australia that are not funded by scholarships. The value to Australia of education-related services imports from Cambodia was A\$13 million (ranked 18th of all countries). The five-year trend was a 19.3 per cent increase in the value of these services from Cambodia, compared to a 6.4 per cent overall increase.³⁵

In 2012–13, a higher proportion of visas (383) was issued to Cambodians not sponsored by DFAT/Defence (for ELICOS (28), schools (48), VET (59), higher education (229), postgraduate research (19)) than for AusAID/Defence awards.³⁶ In total, 672 Cambodian overseas students were studying at the higher education level in Australia in 2013 (with a gender imbalance of 419 male and 253 female students).³⁷

The AEI Report by Nationality for Cambodia (2013) contains data on fee-paying (not Government of Australia sponsored) Cambodian students studying in Australia (not by distance education) detailed by level of study and state (although not by gender). There were 414 Cambodian students enrolled in higher education courses in Australia in 2013. Of these students, 25 per cent were studying at the Masters coursework level, 2 per cent Masters research and 4 per cent at the doctoral level. Of these postgraduate enrolments, 49 per cent are studying management and commerce, 14 per cent society and culture, 8 per cent information technology, 8 per cent education, 6 per cent health, 6 per cent engineering and the remainder in other fields of study.³⁸

6 Conclusions and recommendations

6.1 Achievement of program objectives

Based on the detailed findings above, this section provides a summary assessment of achievement of the current Australia Awards objectives (noting that the alumni were selected over an almost 20 year-period under a range of different program goals and objectives). It also summarises barriers to full achievement of the objectives and the recommendations made to improve the effectiveness of the program.

³⁴ US Commercial Service (2014). Doing business in Cambodia.

³⁵ DFAT (2013). Trade in Services Australia. Table 54

³⁶ Department of Immigration and Citizenship (2013). Offshore and Onshore Grants for 2012-2013 Program Year (includes e-visa grants)

³⁷ Department of Education (2013). Australian Higher Education Stats 2013. Table 7.3: All Overseas Students^(a) by Country of Birth and Gender, Full Year 2013

³⁸ AEI (2014). AEI report by nationality Cambodia (as at year to date 2013)

6.1.1 Increased skills and capacity

While the awards have undoubtedly increased the number of Cambodians with internationally recognised qualifications in Cambodia, this increase in skills and capacity has been imbalanced towards males and those from Phnom Penh.

Between 1996 and 2013, 394 AAS, ALA and CMU alumni completed postgraduate qualifications in Australia (including 94% with a Masters degree, 4% with a PhD). The majority of the alumni studied in the fields of: society and culture (30%), management and commerce (30%), health (12%), and agriculture and environment (11%). Although over time awardees are selected against a range of different field of study priorities, 29 per cent of alumni had studied in current areas of priority identified by DFAT and the RGC, 21 per cent in cross-cutting and 50 per cent in other areas. Of the study undertaken by the 2009–2013 alumni, 60 per cent were in the priority/cross-cutting areas.

In addition to the formal technical skills and knowledge acquired during their award, the survey respondents indicated that they had also improved their capacity in ‘soft-skills’ such as English language, research, analytical and critical thinking and other communication skills, which had proved valuable on their return to the workplace in Cambodia. The alumni also reported benefitting from exposure to a different way of life outside of Cambodia, in a democratic country with sound legal and social protection systems and a high quality tertiary education sector.

The study found some imbalances in the beneficiaries of the award training. For example, only 32 per cent of the 1996–2013 alumni were female. Given the limited educational and work opportunities available to them, very few Cambodians with disability are able to meet the academic requirements for postgraduate study in Australia. As a result, it is not unexpected that only 3 per cent of the survey respondents stated that they had a disability. However, it is noted that none of the alumni population were identified as working in an organisation directly related to supporting people with a disability. Less than one-tenth of the alumni population were recorded as living outside of Phnom Penh.

In line with DFAT policy on gender inclusion in its programs, it is recommended that DFAT accelerate its initiatives to achieve gender equity in the offer of the awards.

(Recommendation 1)

It is also recommended that DFAT accelerate its initiatives to increase the proportion of award offers to candidates from provincial areas outside of Phnom Penh and from organisations supporting people with disability. (Recommendation 2)

6.1.2 Contribution to Cambodia’s development

There was strong evidence to indicate that the majority of the alumni have made significant contributions to their organisation, to their community and towards national development.

Almost all of the surveyed male and female alumni living in Cambodia are in employment relevant to their studies and, despite the barriers and challenges, are overall using their skills and knowledge to producing outputs that are contributing to their organisation in a broad range of areas. Almost two-thirds of the survey respondents felt that their award had been utilised ‘to a great extent’ for Cambodia’s development.

Over two-thirds of the alumni population (68%) were currently employed in the public sector, 20 per cent by a CSO/donor organisation and 11 per cent in the private sector. Almost all of the respondents currently working are in technical, professional and management roles and regularly use the knowledge/skills acquired during their studies. The enhanced skills and knowledge gained by alumni are recognised in a number of ways – over two-thirds have greater technical/operational responsibilities, a greater role in policy development, greater financial responsibilities and/or are supervising more staff. Almost three-quarters of the survey respondents have been promoted since their award, with nearly half currently in managerial roles with the potential to contribute more meaningfully through being in roles with higher decision-making capacity. The significantly higher proportion of the 1996–2003 respondents with managerial roles compared to the 2009–2013 respondents indicates sustained award outcomes.

In contributing to their organisation and as intermediate indicators of contribution to Cambodia's development, the majority of alumni cited tangible examples of the use of the knowledge/skills gained during their study, producing a range of work outputs relevant to Cambodia's development. Over a quarter of the alumni have published research related to their scholarship area of study, almost half of which were in an international academic journal.

There were some significant gender differences between male and female survey respondents in relation to skill utilisation. Male respondents were significantly more likely than females to: state that their skills/knowledge was highly relevant; have already published (or expect to) a piece of research work relevant to their area of award studies; and have a great extent of employer support.

The alumni have made additional contributions beyond the place of main employment. Nearly two-thirds of the survey respondents reported using their skills to a great or medium extent outside of the workplace. The majority of the alumni interviewed reported using their skills and knowledge in a second paid job (often teaching or short-term consultancy work with an CSO/NGO) and/or in a voluntary capacity in educational or community organisations.

While a number of alumni work in a few specific Ministries, it is unrealistic to expect that they can create a critical mass to influence significant change, due to the large number of employees overall and their spread in different offices and locations.

Recommendation 2:

To maximise the impact of the awards, it is recommended that DFAT consider focusing the public category awards on specific target departments within individual ministries. (Recommendation 4).

Although the majority of alumni reported positive outcomes, some alumni reported difficulties in finding relevant or permanent work, particularly those outside the public sector who returned to Cambodia without a job.

It is recommended that consideration be given to providing additional support to alumni to find relevant employment on their return. (Recommendation 3)

Re-integration into the workplace and the opportunity to utilise new skills and capacity effectively is the key barrier to skill utilisation for most returning (public sector) graduates. Over half of the survey respondents reported lack of opportunity to further develop skills/ knowledge, lack of resources and equipment, resistance to new ways of working and thinking and lack of a professional network to share ideas. Only one fifth of respondents had stated that their employer had provided support to 'a great extent' in using their skills/knowledge. Just over one half of respondents transferred their knowledge and skills formally, although three-quarters were able to transfer their skills informally. The 1996-2003 graduates were significantly more likely to, a great or medium extent, transfer their skills than the 2009-2013 graduates. Newly returned respondents were likely to change jobs due to limited opportunities to use their skills or for promotion.

It is recommended that the reintegration workshops provide training to newly returned graduates in skills/knowledge transfer and influencing change. (Recommendation 6)

Many of the public sector alumni interviewed reported that although they had produced relevant outputs, these were not always used to contribute to Cambodia's development due to systemic barriers (such as entrenched bureaucracy, political interests, conservatism and corruption). While the alumni employed by CSO/NGOs provided strong evidence of skill utilisation on specific development related projects (as intermediate outcomes), this study was not able to triangulate evidence as to the extent to which these outputs led to change and a positive impact on Cambodia's development than those working in the government or private sectors. An increasingly robust private sector is expected to drive economic development in Cambodia, however, data on the impact of private sector alumni is still at this stage somewhat limited and inconclusive.

It is recommended that DFAT prioritise a proportion of the awards to Cambodians working in organisations that are able to demonstrate that they both support the alumni to utilise their skills/knowledge and also that alumni outputs are utilised to contribute to Cambodia's development. (Recommendation 5)

The program should also continue its work with (particularly public sector) employers regarding improving reintegration support for alumni on their return to their organisation.

6.1.3 Ongoing links with Australian people, organisations and institutions

The study found that while the alumni formed important and sustained linkages with other AAS alumni (supported through the AAA-C), the program objective of sustained ongoing linkages with Australian people, organisations and institutions was only partially achieved.

While some alumni reported continued social links with Australians and academic/research links with their former institutions, the study found that almost one half of the survey respondents reported never having contact with local communities in Australia (48%), Australian students (40%), former institution staff and lecturers (39%), and AAS students from other countries (38%). Many of the alumni interviewed reported that while in Australia they were in classes with only a few Australian students, and others that they had difficulties interacting with Australian classmates in discussion and group work settings.

Given the overall weak linkages established with Australians while awardees are in Australia, it is recommended that DFAT consider ways to improve the linkages made between Cambodian awardees and Australians while they are on award. (Recommendation 7)

Almost one-third of respondents currently have contact with an Australian organisation in Cambodia through their work, their former institution alumni association and/or with contacts made through the AAA-C. Almost all alumni are AAA-C members, although not necessarily active. The primary benefits of the AAA-C as seen by the alumni are as a link to network with other Cambodian alumni, social and community activities, and to keep up to date with knowledge/skills, rather than to maintain their links to Australia.

To sustain established linkages, and to create new ones, it is recommended that the AAA-C deliver a strong program of activities that connect alumni to Australian organisations and individuals. (Recommendation 8)

6.2 Impressions of Australia

Of the survey respondents, 70 per cent reported an overall very positive impression and 24 per cent a positive impression of Australia. Alumni had overwhelming positive impressions of Australia including that of being a developed country, democratic, multicultural and with a good legal and welfare system and a high quality education system. Australia was viewed as having a safe and peaceful study environment, with its people regarded as being friendly, helpful and nice.

The study found that the survey respondents rated highly the factors of a peaceful and safe study environment, quality of education and the opportunity to bring their families to Australia. Only one survey respondent reported an overall negative impression of Australia. However, when asked about any negative impressions, the respondents most frequently mentioned discrimination/ racism and the weather. Other negative impressions were related to scholarships policy, the cost of living, crime/drugs, leaving their family, returning home, Australia's policy on refugees, the study program, settling family into Australia and difficulty in making friends.

All but one of survey respondents reported that they would recommend Australia as a study destination. Almost half of the respondents also had study experience (long and/or short-term) in one or more countries other than Australia (the majority of which was also sponsored). Compared to other listed countries, they favourably rated the quality of education, student support services, safe place to live and welcome to international students in Australia. They were, however, less positive with respect to comparisons related to the cost of tuition fees and cost of living in Australia.

Recommendations to improve satisfaction with the awards in Cambodia are that:

- **the pre-departure training on discrimination be reviewed to determine whether it can be strengthened to better help Cambodian awardees address any discrimination while in Australia (Recommendation 9)**

- **the level of the pre-departure training stipend be reviewed for financially disadvantaged students** (Recommendation 10)
- **the pre-departure training be reviewed to determine whether it can be strengthened to better prepare awardees for conducting research activities in Australia.** (Recommendation 11).

6.3 Program M&E

Many alumni expressed survey fatigue, stating that they had already provided their views on the awards many times, including in a survey just a few months previously. Many alumni were also reluctant to participate in the qualitative interviews.

It is recommended that the frequency and targeting of M&E activities for the program be reviewed so as to avoid survey fatigue among alumni, and a potentially negative impression of the awards program. (Recommendation 12).

Given the proportion of overseas alumni, it is recommended **that future program M&E include a study on the extent to which overseas alumni make an ongoing contribution to Cambodia's development** (Recommendation 13).