



Australia Awards

Australia Awards Cambodia

End of Program Evaluation

Evaluation Report

Version 2.0, 30 January 2026

Acknowledgements

The evaluation team wishes to thank the many stakeholders who freely gave their time and insights for the appraisal of the Australia Awards Program in Cambodia. Within Cambodia, this included representatives from the Royal Government of Cambodia; staff of the Australian Embassy in Phnom Penh; national universities, research institutes and think tanks; local civil society groups and NGOs; English language training providers; and other scholarship schemes. In Australia, this included the international student contact officers from a range of universities that host Cambodian scholars.

Special thanks are owed to the team managing the Australia Awards program at the Australian Embassy in Phnom Penh, namely Sandra Martinovic and Mory Heng, and the implementation team at Tetra Tech led by Team Leader Michael Sadlon, who collectively provided the plentiful guidance, documents, data and introductions for the conduct of the evaluation, especially the in-country mission. The team is also appreciative of the access given to other A-based and locally engaged staff at the Embassy, to DFAT colleagues from the Global Education and Scholarships section and other thematic and geographic offices, and to staff from Hanoi, Jakarta and Vientiane Posts.

Lastly, the evaluation benefited greatly from the affecting and engaged discussions with alumni, including the Australian Alumni Association of Cambodia, current scholars on award in Australia and students in English Language Training through the Equity Pathways Program.

This report is based upon review of the available evidence, including a wide range of stakeholder perspectives provided to the team. The views expressed in the report are those of the independent evaluation team, and do not necessarily represent the views of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Document Review and Authorisation

| Version | Date distributed | Issued to |
|---------|-------------------|---|
| 1.0 | 22 September 2025 | Sandra Martinovic, DFAT Phnom Penh Post |
| 2.0 | 19 November 2025 | Sandra Martinovic, DFAT Phnom Penh Post |
| 3.0 | 14 January 2025 | Sandra Martinovic, DFAT Phnom Penh Post |

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Acronyms

| | |
|-----------|---|
| AA | Australia Awards |
| AAA-C | Australian Alumni Association of Cambodia |
| AAC | Australia Awards in Cambodia |
| AAF | Australia Awards Fellowships |
| AAGSM | Australia Awards Global Support Mechanism |
| ACCESS | Australia-Cambodia Cooperation for Equitable Sustainable Services |
| ACIAR | Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research |
| ADIS | Alumni Development Impact Survey |
| ASEAN | Association of Southeast Asian Nations |
| Aus4ASEAN | Australia for ASEAN |
| CAPRED | Cambodia-Australia Partnership for Resilient Economic Development |
| CDC | Council for the Development of Cambodia |
| DFAT | Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia) |
| DPP | Australia–Cambodia Development Partnership Plan 2025-2029 |
| ELT | English Language Training |
| EOIO | End-of-Investment –Outcome |
| EPP | Equity Pathways Program |
| ETG | Equity Target Group |
| FGD | Focus Group Discussion |
| GEDSI | Gender equality, disability and social inclusion |
| IELTS | International English Language Testing System |
| ILO | Informal Learning Opportunity |
| IMR | Investment Monitoring Report |
| IO | Intermediate Outcome |
| KEQ | Key Evaluation Question |
| LGBTQIA+ | Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, and other. |
| LTA | Long Term Award |
| MAP | Mekong-Australia Partnership |

| | |
|-------|---|
| MEL | Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning |
| MoEYS | Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport |
| MLVT | Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training |
| MoU | Memorandum of Understanding |
| MoWA | Ministry of Women's Affairs |
| MTR | Mid-Term Review |
| NCP | New Colombo Plan |
| OAE | On-Award Enrichment |
| OPD | Organisation of People with Disabilities |
| OASIS | Online Australia Awards Scholarships Information System |
| PDT | Pre-Departure Training |
| SSI | Semi-Structured Interview |
| STA | Short Term Awards |
| RGC | Royal Government of Cambodia |
| TOR | Terms of Reference |

Executive Summary

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), through the Australian Embassy in Phnom Penh, commissioned Alinea International (Alinea) to conduct an independent End-of-Program Evaluation of the Australia Awards Cambodia (AAC) program. Covering the period from mid-2018 to 2025, the evaluation assesses the program’s strategic alignment, effectiveness, equity, sustainability, and contribution to bilateral cooperation.

Evaluation Scope and Limitations

The evaluation, undertaken between July to September 2025, followed a participatory, mixed-methods, and context-sensitive approach, consistent with DFAT’s Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Standards. It included review of evidence from a wide range of DFAT, AAC, Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) and other relevant documents, and from consultations in Australia and Cambodia with over 108 key stakeholders, including scholars and alumni.

While the evaluation generated a robust evidence base across most key evaluation questions, several contextual and methodological factors constrained the depth of findings in specific areas. Consultation with current scholars was limited, which reduced insight into in-award experiences, wellbeing, and evolving academic or professional trajectories. During the evaluation period, travel was restricted to a limited number of provinces outside Phnom Penh due to border tensions. As a result, engagement focused primarily on available provincial stakeholders and alumni, while direct consultation with some provincial government stakeholders was constrained. While consultations were conducted with over 108 stakeholders, including alumni, implementing partners, DFAT staff, and Cambodian institutions, sample sizes for some cohorts—particularly earlier alumni, people with disability, and self-funded alumni—were small. As a result, qualitative findings and recommendations drawn from these groups should be interpreted as indicative rather than statistically representative. These constraints are reflected in the nuance and framing of findings and recommendations throughout the report.

Program Overview

AAC is a long-standing initiative supporting Cambodia’s human resource development through postgraduate scholarships and short-term awards. The current phase (2018–2026), valued at A\$25.4 million, is implemented by Tetra Tech. Over 1,000 Cambodians have studied in Australia under the AAC and predecessor programs.

The AAC goal is to support Cambodia to progress its development goals and have strong relationships with Australia that advance mutual interests. It’s end of investment outcomes are that:

- Alumni are using their skills, knowledge, and networks to contribute to Cambodia’s sustainable development (EOIO1); and
- Alumni are contributing to cooperation between Australia and Cambodia (EOIO2).

The program delivers:

- Long-Term Awards (LTAs) – Master’s and PhD (Australia Awards Scholarships, supplemented by awards funded under the Mekong-Australia Partnership and Aus4ASEAN).
- Short-Term Awards (STAs) – Professional development courses.
- Complementary components – Equity Pathways Program (EPP), English Language Training (ELT), On-Award Enrichment (OAE), and Alumni Engagement.

Since 2018, the program has awarded 383 scholarships (367 Masters, 1 by Research, 16 PhDs) and supported the reintegration of 216 alumni. Its holistic model—covering pre-departure, study in Australia, and alumni engagement—provides a strong foundation for supporting quality candidate selection, academic success, and post-award engagement, although evidence of longer-term institutional and system-level outcomes remains uneven, particularly for earlier cohorts.

Key Findings

KEQ 1: To what extent is the Australian Awards program strategically aligned with and relevant to Cambodia's national development priorities and DFAT's objectives?

Strategic Alignment & Relevance: AAC aligns strongly with Cambodia's *Pentagonal Strategy Phase 1*, DFAT's *Australia-Cambodia Development Partnership Plan 2025-29*, and regional priorities including climate resilience and GEDSI. The program has diversified into emerging fields; however, the largely open field-of-study model limits the program's ability to build critical mass in priority sectors. Any shift toward more targeted approaches will require careful balancing to avoid unintentionally narrowing access for Equity Pathways Program (EPP) candidates and reducing overall inclusivity.

Equity & Access: AAC has made progress in inclusion, with women comprising 56% of the 2026 intake and the first Indigenous scholar mobilised in 2024. However, systemic barriers persist for people with disabilities and provincial candidates. EPP has improved access; however, many barriers—such as prior educational disadvantage, English language exposure, and workplace flexibility—sit outside AAC's direct control. Accordingly, the evaluation focuses on areas where AAC and DFAT can realistically influence access—such as ELT design, outreach, selection processes, and partnership arrangements—while also highlighting opportunities for AAC to contribute to longer-term mitigation of these constraints through strengthened coordination with relevant national institutions, employers, and sector partners.

KEQ 2: To what extent has AAC achieved its outcomes?

Achievement of Outcomes: The AAC is achieving its intended outcomes. Contributing to this are high graduation rates (99%) and strong alumni employment (89% within six months) in government, civil society, and private sectors. Alumni have passed on their knowledge and skills to others (75%) and introduced improved practices and innovation in the workplace (84%) to contribute to Cambodia's sustainable development (EOIO1).

Recent alumni are maintaining linkages with Australia and are directly contributing to cooperation with Australia through participating, facilitating, or influencing collaborative works (mentioned by 31% of alumni in the Alumni Development Impact Survey (ADIS) 2024). Entering into a mutual agreement between the two countries at an organisational level was however reported by only 3% of the recently completing alumni. consultations suggest that many recent returnees occupy junior or mid-level positions with limited authority to initiate formal partnerships.

Earlier alumni – especially male cohorts– are increasingly represented in senior leadership and decision-making roles. Many are supporting cooperation and engagement with the Embassy, Australian investments in Cambodia, and Australian delegations. While systematic data on Australian–Cambodian institutional partnerships initiated by these cohorts is limited, their seniority positions them well to influence such collaboration, indicating unrealised potential rather than underperformance. More structured approaches are needed to track, analyse, and understand the nature, depth, and pathways of alumni-enabled cooperation. Strengthening alumni data collection and partnership mapping would provide a clearer

evidence base to inform more targeted and effective alumni-led collaboration strategies between Cambodian and Australian organisations (EOIO2).

Learning & Adaptation. AAC MEL successfully captures and uses program data to manage the scholarships cycle and for reporting to DFAT Cambodia and to the global Australia Awards. A strong culture of reflection, learning and adaptive management has been established. However, the evaluation found scope to improve the synthesis and presentation of MEL data for DFAT, particularly in relation to trend analysis, risks, and program-level outcomes, to better support strategic decision-making.

KEQ 3: How sustainable are the investment's outcomes and what is the quality of ongoing engagement with alumni?

Alumni Engagement & Sustainability: AAC's alumni programming has matured, with expanded activities and research grants. Engagement with less recently returned alumni and with self-funded alumni remains limited. The Australian Alumni Association of Cambodia (AAA-C) faces capacity and inclusivity challenges, including uneven representation of women, provincial alumni, and people with disabilities in leadership and activities, limited mechanisms to ensure diverse voices influence agenda-setting, and reliance on a small group of active members that constrains broader participation. On this note, the evaluation did not assess in depth how the current Australian Alumni Engagement Strategy (2021–2025) has been implemented, which limits the ability to draw firm conclusions about implementation gaps. Nonetheless, evidence suggests that a refreshed strategy could strengthen coherence, clarify roles, and move engagement beyond activity tracking toward influence and partnership outcomes. This would contribute to the harvesting and harnessing of alumni contacts that are forged by different sections of the Embassy, and provide a consolidated picture of the linkages across sectors and segments of Cambodian society.

Public Diplomacy & Influence: AAC enhances Australia's visibility and credibility in Cambodia. Alumni act as informal ambassadors, promoting Australian education and values. Strategic communications and sectoral initiatives have amplified Australia's profile, though the coordination of AAC communication products with Embassy priorities and scheduling could be improved. The evaluation identified opportunities to improve coordination between AAC communication products and Embassy-wide public diplomacy priorities; this finding is based on consultations indicating ad hoc scheduling and limited forward planning rather than deficiencies in communication quality.

Considerations for a Future Phase of Australia Awards Cambodia (AAC)

The considerations outlined below expand on evaluation findings, lessons from other Australia Awards programs, DFAT strategic priorities (including Invested and the Development Partnership Plan), and emerging opportunities for deeper system influence and locally led development (LLD), consistent with [Annex D](#). Given the evaluation's limitations, these are framed as options rather than prescriptive recommendations.

The future phase of AAC could evolve beyond a scholarship delivery mechanism toward a more integrated platform for human capital development, institutional partnerships, and bilateral cooperation.

1. Embed locally led development principles more systematically.

Ensure structured Cambodian stakeholder input across the award cycle, particularly in identifying critical knowledge and skill gaps and informing the targeting approach. Strengthen partnerships with priority organisations that align with Australia's strategic objectives in Cambodia. The rationale for encouraging employer engagement during the award period is to improve relevance and utilisation of skills upon return, addressing a current gap where reintegration planning is often deferred until completion. This includes

formalising partnership agreements (e.g., MoUs) with ministries, universities, civil society organisations, and Organisations of Persons with Disability (OPDs) to:

- co-identify high-quality candidates;
- maintain employer contact with scholars while on-award; and
- support structured reintegration, knowledge utilisation, and career progression upon return.

2. Consolidate sectoral and thematic focus to maximise critical mass and system influence.

More focused thematic areas could strengthen system-level impact; however, any targeting must be designed carefully to avoid excluding EPP candidates or narrowing pathways for non-traditional applicants. Periodic reviews and an “open field” component can help manage these trade-offs. The next phase should therefore consider the following:

- define a focused set of priority sectors (e.g., climate resilience, digital economy, public service reform, TVET) based on evidence and stakeholder consultations;
- ensure flexibility through periodic (annual or biennial) targeting workshops that jointly review emerging Cambodian priorities;
- integrate these sectors with DFAT’s investments in Cambodia and the region, so alumni skills feed directly into ongoing reforms; and
- align short courses and long-term awards to reinforce sectoral ecosystems rather than operate as standalone opportunities.

Further detail on the recommended targeting approach is provided in [Annex B](#).

3. Introduce fit-for-purpose and cost-effective modalities to expand access and relevance.

To reach more diverse professional cohorts and support inclusive participation, the next phase should adopt a suite of cost-effective, context-appropriate modalities, such as:

- in-country or partially in-country scholarships for people with disabilities and Indigenous Cambodians, in partnership with accessible universities;
- targeted short courses for mid-career professionals and provincial staff unable to undertake long-term study;
- extended English language pathways, including pre-IELTS preparation, conditional offer arrangements, and inclusive testing accommodations;
- micro-credentials and online learning packages in priority thematic areas.

Modalities successfully used in Indonesia, Vietnam, and Timor-Leste (summarised in [Annex A](#)) provide adaptable models for Cambodia.

4. Strengthen the alumni ecosystem and position alumni as long-term partners in development and diplomacy.

The next phase should adopt a more deliberate and structured strategy for alumni engagement, including older cohorts, AAF/ACIAR alumni, and self-funded graduates. A refreshed Australian Embassy Alumni Engagement Strategy should:

- Define objectives and outcomes, for both diplomacy and development purposes, that contribute to bilateral and regional strategies (foreign policy, economic and development);
- Identify target cohorts based on sectoral relevance and influence potential;
- Prioritise alumni engagement activities that yield the greatest development and diplomatic impact;

- Clarify implementation arrangements, including partnerships with private sector actors and strengthened support for the AAA-C.
- Establish robust long-term alumni tracking systems (drawing on Indonesia and Timor-Leste models—see [Annex A](#)), such as biennial updates and periodic ADIS-style surveys;
- Consider creating thematic sectors or Communities of Practice to facilitate professional networking and collaboration, building on successful models such as Aus4Skills in Vietnam.
- Include more structured approaches to foster alumni-led collaboration between Cambodian and Australian organisations. For example, through small partnership seed grants (AUD 5–15k) for alumni–Australian university research collaborations.

Lessons on how alumni associations operate in other countries are detailed in [Annex C](#).

5. Explore co-funding and cost-sharing with the Royal Government of Cambodia.

In line with the *Invested: Australia's Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040*, initiate dialogue with the RGC to establish co-investment and cost-sharing arrangements. Co-funding can demonstrate mutual commitment and create pathways for eventual financial sustainability, while cost-sharing arrangements can broaden institutional engagement without compromising merit or equity. Models such as Indonesia's LPDP–Australia Awards collaborations offer useful precedents.

Further discussion on design considerations for the next phase of the program can be found in [Annex D](#).

1. Introduction

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), through the Australian Embassy in Phnom Penh Cambodia, commissioned Alinea International (Alinea) to conduct the independent End-of-Program Evaluation of the Australia Awards program in Cambodia (AAC).

This report draws on evaluation activities undertaken between July and September 2025. It presents the evaluation team's findings on the achievement of end-of-investment outcomes and detailed responses to the Key Evaluation Questions. It also makes recommendations to inform the remaining period of AAC implementation and the forthcoming design of Australia's future scholarships and human resource investment in Cambodia. The evaluation covers the period mid-2018 to date.

1.1. Australia Awards Cambodia

The AAC is a long-standing Australian Government initiative that supports Cambodia's human resource development and bilateral cooperation through the provision of postgraduate scholarships and short-term professional awards. The current phase (mid-2018 to mid-2026) is valued at A\$25.4 million, and has been implemented by Tetra Tech on behalf of DFAT Phnom Penh. This builds on earlier phases dating back to 1994. To date, more than 1,000 Cambodians have studied in Australia under this and predecessor programs, strengthening national capacity and fostering people-to-people links.

The AAC goal is to: Support Cambodia to progress its development goals and have strong relationships with Australia that advance mutual interests

The AAC provides:

- **Long-Term Awards (LTAs):** Master and PhD scholarships in Australia (Australia Awards Scholarships, supplemented by awards funded under the Mekong-Australia Partnership (MAP) and Aus4ASEAN).
- **Short-Term Awards (STAs):** Professional development courses and exchanges, including those funded by MAP Phase 1 (now concluded).
- **Complementary components:**
 - *Equity Pathways Program (EPP):* Targeted support for women, people with disabilities, and rural candidates.
 - *English Language and Pre-Departure Training (ELT/PDT):* Up to 6 months of ELT and a 3-week PDT (blended online and in-person mode).
 - *On-Award Enrichment (OAE):* Leadership and networking support during study.
 - *Alumni Engagement (AE):* Activities to sustain networks and promote development and diplomacy outcomes.

1.2. Program Logic

The AAC program logic has undergone three iterations over the course of implementation. (See [Annex I](#) for the original logic from the Investment Design Document (IDD)). The current version of the program logic

comprises¹ two End-of-Investment Outcomes (EOIOs) and three Intermediate Outcomes (IOs) with a focus on alumni impact, bilateral cooperation, and inclusive development:

- **EOIO 1:** Alumni are using their skills, knowledge, and networks to contribute to Cambodia’s sustainable development.
- **EOIO 2:** Alumni are contributing to cooperation between Australia and Cambodia.

These are supported by three Intermediate Outcomes (IOs):

- Positive perceptions of Australia, Australians, and Australian expertise (IO1);
- Acquisition of relevant skills and knowledge (IO2); and
- Development and use of professional networks (IO3).

The AAC prioritises equity, with strong representation of women and targeted outreach to equity target groups. Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) systems track participation and outcomes across gender, disability, and geographic dimensions.

1.3. Development Context

Over the past decades, Australia has been a key partner in Cambodia’s development, collaborating on economic, governance, and capacity-building initiatives. Cambodia’s new leadership is pursuing a more diversified foreign policy, emphasising multi-alignment, economic diplomacy, and strategic autonomy. In this context, a “people-centric” development approach offers Australia a distinctive and credible way to engage.

Education, one of Australia’s major exports, plays a central role in the bilateral relationship. Scholarships and study opportunities seek to foster goodwill, build influence among future Cambodian leaders, and strengthen long-term partnerships. Alumni of the AAC are expected to contribute to national development priorities in Cambodia, enhancing the country’s human capital while creating a network of advocates for continued Australia–Cambodia collaboration. By investing in the education and capacity development of Cambodian professionals, Australia positions itself as a trusted partner, supporting RGC in navigating a complex geopolitical landscape and promoting regional stability. (See [Annex L](#) for further discussion of the context for the delivery of the AAC.)

2. End-of-Program Evaluation

2.1. Purpose

The primary purpose of the independent End-of-Program Evaluation of the AAC is to assess the overall performance of the current phase of the program (2018-2026). This includes distilling results and lessons learned to inform DFAT decision making to shape the next phase of scholarships investment (post-2026).

The primary audience for this evaluation is the DFAT Phnom Penh Post, particularly the Executive and Development Cooperation teams. Key secondary audiences include the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC), DFAT Canberra and Tetra Tech, the Managing Contractor. It is intended that the evaluation report will be made available to a wider range of stakeholders through its publication on DFAT’s website. The

¹ Revised following the Mid-Term Review (MTR) in 2021 to better reflect strategic priorities and outcome orientation.

evaluation also serves as an accountability mechanism for the above stakeholders, as well as alumni, scholars, and the Australian public.

2.2. Scope

Commencing on 14 July 2025, the evaluation was commissioned to cover the following elements:

- An assessment to ensure AAC's alignment with Cambodia's national development priorities and DFAT's strategic objectives, including gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI), localisation, and climate resilience;
- An evaluation of the efficiency and effectiveness of AAC implementation across Long-Term Awards, Short-Term Awards, and alumni engagement activities; and
- The identification of new or enhanced design elements to strengthen future programming, particularly in relation to equity, institutional partnerships, and public diplomacy.

2.3. Key Evaluation Questions

The evaluation was framed according to three Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs) and related themes (see [Annex B](#) for the full list), as follows:

- **KEQ 1:** To what extent is the Australian Awards program strategically aligned with and relevant to Cambodia's national development priorities and DFAT's objectives?
- **KEQ 2:** To what extent has AAC achieved its outcomes?
- **KEQ 3:** How sustainable are the investment's outcomes and what is the quality of ongoing engagement with alumni?

2.4. Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation followed a participatory, mixed-methods, and context-sensitive approach, consistent with DFAT's MEL Standards. As elaborated in the Evaluation Plan, the methodology was designed to ensure diverse and inclusive stakeholder engagement and rigorous data triangulation, to generate well substantiated findings and practical recommendations for future programming.

As detailed in [Annex F](#), between July to September 2025, the evaluation included the following stages:

- Development of an evaluation plan;
- Desktop review of a wide range of DFAT, AAC, RGC and other relevant documents, as listed in the terms of reference.
- Conduct of over 54 face-to-face and online inclusive consultations in Australia and Cambodia with 108 stakeholders (61 women, 47 men). This including semi-structured interviews (with DFAT staff, ACIAR, Tetra Tech, RGC ministries, Cambodian and Australian universities, other development partners, and selected alumni, including EPP participants and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with AAS scholars and alumni (as listed in [Annex G](#));
- Analysis, triangulation and reflection on the quantitative and qualitative data;
- A validation and sensemaking workshop with DFAT Phnom Penh Post and AAC Managing Contractor staff to test preliminary findings and refine recommendations; and
- Submission of an Aide Memoire and draft/final Evaluation Reports.

2.5. Evaluation Limitations

The findings, evidence, opportunities for consideration, and recommendations presented in this report are based on the evaluation team’s analysis of documentary evidence, inclusive consultations, and lessons learned from other Australia Awards country programs. Nevertheless, several limitations affected the depth and scope of the analysis:

- **Scope and time constraints:** The sheer number and breadth of AAC activities required prioritisation in the evaluation, with emphasis placed on strategic alignment, equity, alumni impact, and system-level observations rather than exhaustive assessment of all program components.
- **Security and logistical challenges:** At the commencement of the evaluation, conflict between Cambodia and Thailand took place in the border regions. This initially curtailed evaluation team travel to particular provinces. The spontaneous exodus of an estimated 1 million Cambodian workers from Thailand meant that provincial authorities in Battambang and Siem Reap were not available for consultations.
- **Data gaps:** The AAC MEL system is well developed and populated, evidenced by the AAC team being able to respond quickly to the data requests over the course of the evaluation. However, gaps were noted, especially in terms of data sources for tracking longer-term alumni outcomes, institutional change or impact and alumni collaboration with Australian organisations.
- **Limited consultation with current scholars:** Due to competing priorities during the exam period and the compressed timeframe for data collection, the evaluation team was not able to consult directly with many current AAS awardees (or self-funded students) studying in Australia.

3. Key Findings - KEQ 1: Strategic Alignment and Relevance

Sections 3-5 presents the evidence gathered and findings drawn by the evaluation team against the KEQs and related sub-questions. The discussion in each sub-section concludes with the identification of opportunities for enhancing achievement against end-of-program outcomes, where noted. Given only six months of activity implementation remain in this phase (as of November 2025), these opportunities are mostly presented for consideration by the design team. A summary of the findings against the OECD DAC criteria and key recommendations is presented in Section 6.

3.1. Strategic Alignment & Targeting

KEQ 1.1 – AAC alignment with priority development areas

How effectively does the AAC align with priority development areas, particularly in emerging sectors such as GEDSI and climate change?

The AAC demonstrates strong alignment with both Cambodian and Australian development priorities, including cross-cutting sectors such as GEDSI and climate change.

Cambodia’s *Pentagonal Strategy – Phase I* sets out five ‘pentagons’ (or priorities) for achieving upper middle-income country status: 1) human capital development; 2) economic diversification and competitiveness; 3) private sector growth and employment; 4) resilient, sustainable and inclusive development; and 5) digital economy and society. The AAC contributes to all five pentagons, to a certain

extent, but particularly pentagons 1, 4 and 5. AAC articulates closely with these three pentagons on account of its contribution to human resource development (#1), focus on equity (#4), and supporting qualifications in critical, emerging sectors such as the digital sphere. In addition to alignment with the text of the strategy, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport and Ministry of Women’s Affairs affirmed the relevance of the AAC to Cambodia’s development and future. A representative from the Council of Ministers who had participated in the AAC short course on *Strengthening Cabinet Operations and Public Sector Reform in Cambodia (2024)* also highlighted that Australia’s promotion of women’s participation in the study tour to Australia was consistent with Cambodia’s *Neary Rattanak IV* and its gender equality objectives.

To respond to the development and human resource needs across Cambodia, applications are open to all fields of study (except for general management degrees). Traditional disciplines—public policy, public health, education, environmental science, and development studies—continue to dominate award offers. Recent intakes, informed by Embassy priorities, also show diversification into emerging areas such as climate science, artificial intelligence, maritime studies, rehabilitation, data science, fintech, actuarial studies, and cybersecurity.

Bilaterally, the AAC makes a contribution to all three objectives of the *Australia–Cambodia Development Partnership Plan (DPP) 2025–2029*, namely: 1) stronger institutions and better governance [where AAC is explicitly referenced]; 2) public services are more inclusive [with AAC supporting public sector awardees and exposing them to AAC’s commitment to inclusion]; and 3) a more resilient, inclusive and sustainable economy [with the Ministry of Economy and Finance having a leading number of alumni]. The DPP emphasises climate change, sustainable and inclusive growth, human development, locally led development, institutional linkages, and GEDSI. The AAC supports Australia’s achievement of these priorities through scholarships and alumni engagement that strengthen local skills and networks, and foster equity.

At the regional level, the AAC is also highly resonant with *Invested: Australia’s Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040*, and its emphasis on Education and Skills (Chapter 7). Education is framed as a ‘national asset’ in engaging with Southeast Asia and the region’s skills uplift and is considered ‘integral to building enduring relationships and economic prosperity with the region’. The Cambodia country profile and action plan in the strategy appendix specifically notes:

Australia is the most popular English language destination for Cambodian tertiary students, making Australian tertiary and vocational education providers well placed to contribute to the upskilling of the Cambodian workforce...

The strategy further prescribes for Australia to leverage the alumni community to connect government and the private sector; and to promote education links between Cambodia and key Australian universities and certification bodies, including through twinning arrangements. AAC is well aligned with these priority actions.

In terms of DFAT’s equity priorities, AAC has delivered steady progress on gender equality, with women awardees averaging 54% of the Intakes from 2019 to 2026 (up from 42% in the five years prior). Women’s representation across the scholarships cycle has also continually increased, accounting for the majority of shortlisted applicants in all but Intake 2023 since 2020. Despite the EPP and concerted outreach efforts, the number of selected applicants with disabilities varies each year, averaging 2% of awards conferred since Intake 2019.

Opportunities to enhance alignment include:

- Embedding locally led development by involving RGC and other Cambodian stakeholders more systematically throughout the scholarship cycle. This would include at the award targeting stage, through encouraging employer involvement in maintaining contact with awardees during their study (including in informing the relevancy of awardee subject and assignment choices); and particularly during awardee reintegration. Refining award targeting to more closely align with emerging national priorities for Cambodia and Australia (including as identified in the ten priority sectors in *Invested: Australia’s Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040*²). Exploring co-funding and cost-sharing with the RGC and the private sector to enhance funding sustainability and demonstrate mutual ownership, drawing on lessons from other DFAT programs, where available. Co-funding (direct financial contribution) would provide a tangible demonstration of financial commitment and cost-sharing (in-kind support such as staff release, training facilities, or program management resources) would facilitate broader institutional engagement.
- Consideration of areas introduced by the *Invested* strategy, including developing country alumni strategies that better engage self-funded alumni, exploring co-financing options between universities and sending countries to increase the number of scholarships; and expanding vocational education offerings.

KEQ 1.2 – AAS level of study targeting

To what extent does the current targeting strategy (including PhD focus) reflect AAC’s strategic objectives and Cambodia’s national priorities? To what extent is AAC consistent with the global Australia Awards framework and policies?

AAC awards are offered at the postgraduate level, with a small number of awards offered for PhD study to strengthen Cambodia’s underdeveloped research sector. Consultations with MoEYS and research institutions highlight the urgent need for qualified academics to advance tertiary education.

Since 2019, AAC has offered 383 awards, of which 366 have been for Master’s by Coursework study. The AAC has also mobilised 16 PhD scholars and supported them through mentoring and the Alumni Research Grants (ARGs). Uptake of Master’s by Research awards has been minimal (two awards from 19 applications), not including the Aus4ASEAN-funded complement (12) for Intake 2025. Stakeholders consistently highlighted several structural barriers that help explain the low uptake. In particular, entry requirements for Master of Research programs are almost equivalent to those for PhD admission: candidates are expected to prepare a detailed research proposal, secure an academic supervisor in Australia, and in many cases obtain provisional admission prior to selection. For many Cambodian applicants—especially those without strong undergraduate research training—these expectations are prohibitive. The limited applicant pool is also shaped by high English language proficiency requirements, the early stage of research-methods exposure in most Cambodian undergraduate curricula, and limited access to research mentorship or publication opportunities that would strengthen competitiveness.

² Agriculture and food, resources, green energy transition, infrastructure, education and skills, visitor economy, healthcare, digital economy, professional and financial services and creative industries.

Table 1: Awards by Study Level, 2019 – 2026 Intakes

| Intake | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 | 2025 | 2026 |
|-----------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Total awards offered. | 48 | 44 | 29 | 55 | 45 | 45 | 62 | 55 |
| Master by Coursework | 48 | 43 | 29 | 52 | 43 | 42 | 56 | 53 |
| Master by Research | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| PhD | 0 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 6 | 2 |

PhDs are high-cost investments (3–4 years compared to 1–2 years for Masters), requiring careful selection to ensure relevance and utilisation. Evidence of impact remains limited and difficult to generalise given the small number of returnees. While cost is only one metric to consider, a PhD is equivalent to four 1-year Master’s degrees and twice the cost of an average short course (for multiple participants).

Table 2: Degrees, by Duration and Estimated Unit Cost³

| Degree | Estimate per unit (AUD) |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|
| PhD (4 years) | \$400,000 |
| Master’s degree (for 1 year) | \$90,000 |
| Master’s degree (for 1.5 years) | \$120,000 |
| Master’s degree (for 2 years) | \$140,000 |

Opportunities to strengthen study-level relevance include:

- Collaborating with Ponlok Chomnes, DFAT’s capacity building initiative for knowledge sector institutions in Cambodia, to guide selection and support for research awards. Since Ponlok Chomnes already delivers capacity-building programs and supports emerging researchers, partnering with them could strengthen AAC’s research pipeline and institutional linkages. If AAC’s objective extends beyond increasing Master of Research or PhD applicants to enhancing Cambodia’s knowledge sector institutions, working with Ponlok Chomnes could help guide candidate selection and provide structured support for research awards.
- Offer of PhD awards in priority fields such as technology and innovation, climate science, trade and economic development, disability inclusion, and education reform.

KEQ 1.3 – Integration with DFAT investments and sectoral targeting

How well does AAC complement and integrate with other DFAT investments and priorities? To what extent has the AAC targeted particular sectoral groups (e.g. RGC and public / private / NGO sector), and what has been the implication? Is the AAC attracting applicants aligned with strategic sectors and equity goals? How is this assessed?

There is no explicit sectoral or organisational targeting by AAC, with awards offered to candidates from private, NGO and public sectors. In recent years, however, the AAC has increased its focus on promoting the awards to the RGC, given the decline in successful public sector applicants. Although fields of study are open, Australia’s bilateral development priorities are represented among those commonly chosen. This creates alignment between the AAC and other DFAT investments in Cambodia. However, closer and intentional alignment would enhance outcomes across the development portfolio.

Currently, AAC does not apply explicit sectoral or organisational quotas, with awards offered to candidates from private, NGO, and public sectors. However, in recent years AAC has increased its focus on promoting

³ Estimates provided by the AAC team, September 2025.

awards to the RGC, responding to the decline in successful public sector applicants. While fields of study remain open, Australia’s bilateral development priorities are reflected in commonly chosen disciplines, creating natural alignment with other DFAT investments in Cambodia. Moving toward a more structured and intentional approach—through joint planning, shared candidate identification, and reintegration support with other DFAT Programs—would enhance coherence and outcomes across the development portfolio.

While government staff once dominated award offers, the decline in quality applications from the public sector (see further discussion under KEQ 2.1) and strong NGO and private sector applications have changed the sectoral balance of awardees. This shift reflects Cambodia’s increasingly plural development ecosystem, where civil society and private actors are central to service delivery and reform. For Intake 2025, the proportion of awards for public sector applicants fell to 27%, before rebounding as a result of AAC interventions to 36% in Intake 2026.

The rationale for promoting applications from across RGC, NGOs, and private enterprise is clear: government candidates support policy reform, NGOs drive innovation and advocacy, and private sector awardees strengthen Cambodia’s economic integration. Awards have been offered to 97 non-RGC and 21 RGC DFAT partners, including 21 out of 23 Ministries. There have however been a high number of awards to applicants from the partners that DFAT works most closely with the Ministry of Economy and Finance, and the Ministry of Women’s Affairs-. Achieving the right balance will require more systematic alignment with the DPP. The Cambodia-Australia Partnership for Resilient Economic Development (CAPRED)’s labour market and skills forecasting would also be instructive for identifying priority partners in critical sectors of the future.

The AAC does not operate in isolation. Its relevance is (in part) amplified through integration with DFAT’s broader development portfolio. This includes in Cambodia with CAPRED, Australia-Cambodia Cooperation for Equitable Sustainable Services Phase 2 (ACCESS 2), Ponlok Chomnes, Health Equity and Quality Improvement Project Phase 2 (H-EQIP 2), Implementation of the Social Accountability Framework Phase 2 (I-SAF 2). Alumni participation in joint consultations with these programs, including for example, participation in the Futures Analysis Training, and Australasian Aid Conferences, demonstrates how scholarships can serve as an entry into broader sectoral dialogue.

More could be done to link alumni with participants/alumni in Australian government’s other international programs – including the DFAT Australia Awards Fellowships (AAF), the New Colombo Plan (NCP), and the Australian Volunteers Program (AVP) and the fellowships funded by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR).

Opportunities to strengthen investment outcomes include to:

- Balance program modalities, clarifying the role and value of long-term awards (PhDs) and short-term training to ensure complementarity and value for money.
- Sharpen thematic targeting, moving beyond open award allocation to prioritise fields aligned with Cambodia’s development agenda and DFAT’s regional priorities. This could be actioned through:
 - Engaging with the RGC on critical skills mapping, including in coordination with CAPRED on its labour market and skills forecasting, to guide the offer of LTAs and STAs.
 - Establishing a cross-program coordination mechanism to maximise cooperation between the AAC with other DFAT investments across the scholarship cycle identifying field of study priorities, supporting high quality applicants (particularly those from the ETGs) to apply,

and supporting alumni to find relevant employment and to utilise their knowledge and skills.

- More specifically targeting of RGC, private sector and NGO organisational partners to achieve greater impact arising from a critical mass of alumni with specialised knowledge and skills.
- The AAC to actively assist connections between the AAS alumni and Cambodian AAF/ACIAR alumni and with Australians NCP/AVP engaged in Cambodia.

3.1 Equity and Access

KEQ 1.4 – Barriers for marginalised groups

What are key barriers to participation and award outcomes including reintegration, relevant employment, and influence for marginalised groups (e.g. provincial and Indigenous populations, LGBTQI+, people with disabilities), and how have these evolved since the Mid-Term Review (MTR)?

The primary barriers for the equity target groups under AAC are lifecycle exclusion from school education, as well as limited access to English language learning (including due to the low availability of English language centres outside of Phnom Penh), and limited opportunities for these cohorts to enrol in and complete undergraduate study in Cambodia. For those who succeed in accessing scholarships, further barriers emerge during study in Australia and on reintegration into Cambodian workplaces, limiting equitable employment and their influence in the workplace.

Access Barriers

The most significant barrier to AAS entry remains the English language requirement. The AAC strictly applies the DFAT Policy Handbook requirement for an International English Language Testing System (IELTS) score of 6.0 threshold at the application stage, which filters out many otherwise capable candidates, particularly those from rural areas and lower-tier Cambodian universities.

Based on the interviews and FGDs with equity groups, for people with disabilities, challenges are exacerbated by lack of access to education across the life cycle, and even the limited availability of inclusive IELTS testing in Cambodia. For example, the AAC has had to provide funding for candidates to sit IELTS exams in Thailand where proper accommodations exist in terms of accessible materials, IT and time sequencing of test tasks (resulting in more accurate and higher test results). For Indigenous candidates, the pool remains extremely narrow due to very low undergraduate level graduation rates, reflecting broader inequities in Cambodia's education system. Geography compounds these challenges: rural applicants present with more limited English and research skills, and have more limited access to progression in the workplace.

Barriers to Outcomes

Even for those who succeed in being offered an award, barriers continue during the on-award and reintegration phases.

- **On-award barriers:** Scholars with disabilities report challenges in pedagogy and accessibility at Australian institutions. Despite university efforts, gaps remain in provision of assistive technologies, accessible materials, and inclusive teaching practices. Social isolation, compounded by cultural and language barriers, has also been noted by people with disabilities and LGBTQI+ scholars.
- **Reintegration barriers:** On return, alumni from marginalised groups report that they face systemic challenges in securing employment that fully utilises their skills. Women alumni often encounter

entrenched gender norms that limit leadership opportunities, despite evidence of strong academic and professional performance. Alumni with disabilities may be welcomed symbolically but face structural obstacles in workplace accessibility, career progression, and opportunities for influence.

- **Career progression barriers:** Data from the AAC alumni surveys suggests that while most alumni find relevant employment, equity target groups are less likely to achieve leadership roles or policy influence compared to mainstream cohorts. Indigenous and provincial alumni are often disconnected from national-level policy networks, limiting their ability to leverage their skills for broader systemic change and development impact. The AAC analysis show that women alumni remain underrepresented in senior decision-making positions despite AAC's success in a gender-balanced intake.

Evolution Since the Mid-Term Review

Since the 2021 Mid-Term Review, AAC has introduced the current iteration of the EPP, which expanded the provision of ELT, mentoring, IELTS support, and professional development for applicants from equity groups. As a result, the AAC annual reports show that conversion rates (from application to award offer) for equity target groups rose from 9% in earlier years to 20% in Intake 2026, with particular gains for women and provincial candidates. Nonetheless, award offers to Indigenous Cambodians and people with a disability remains low.

While the AAC has implemented a number of initiatives to specifically support women's career progression, including as host of the first regional AAS Women in Leadership course, these activities have not been hosted in recent years. The lack of access to a GEDSI adviser (either in the AAC team or via the Embassy) is notable. Resourcing GEDSI advisory inputs would be warranted in the next phase of the AAC, to maintain momentum in supporting equitable outcomes, including responding to trends in the MEL data such as women having less access to promotion upon return. A dedicated GEDSI adviser would provide strategic oversight to embed equity and inclusion across the entire award cycle, ensuring that targeting, selection, and reintegration processes systematically address barriers faced by women, people with disability, Indigenous groups, and other marginalised cohorts. This role could strengthen alignment with DFAT's GEDSI commitments by guiding partnerships with OPDs, advising on tailored ELT and readiness pipelines, and shaping alumni engagement strategies that amplify inclusive leadership and influence. By integrating GEDSI expertise into program design and monitoring, AAC can move beyond ad hoc measures toward a structured, evidence-based approach that delivers measurable equity outcomes and enhances Australia's reputation for inclusive development.

The evaluation team also recommend to continue to strengthen institutional partnerships with relevant ministries, particularly with the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation (MoSVY) as the lead ministry for disability policy, social protection, and rehabilitation, and the Disability Action Council (DAC) as the strategic coordination body. Engagement with these ministries—together with OPDs—is critical for effective outreach and for identifying and addressing barriers faced by persons with disabilities.

It is also important to build strong strategic partnerships with the National Institute of Specialised Education (NISE) under the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) to enhance equity pathways. NISE brings specialised expertise across different types of disabilities (e.g., visual, hearing, intellectual, autism), enabling education to be adapted to diverse needs. Through its work, NISE helps institutionalise special education within the national education system and supports students with disabilities to access higher education. The design of the upcoming equity pathway should be developed in consultation with NISE to ensure sustainable outcomes.

Future collaboration should also consider engaging other ministries that influence human capital development and inclusion, such as the Ministry of Women’s Affairs (MoWA) for gender equality initiatives and the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training (MLVT) for TVET and workforce integration. These partnerships would enable AAC to align scholarship targeting with national policy priorities and strengthen reintegration pathways for alumni.

Opportunities to strengthen equity pathways and outcomes include to:

- Consider lowering IELTS application thresholds for equity cohorts, combined with extended ELT⁴.
- Build long-term preparatory pipelines (e.g., pre-EPP models for people with disability and Indigenous candidates).
- Strengthen institutional partnerships with ministries, universities and OPDs to create inclusive reintegration pathways.
- Resource a GEDSI adviser.
- Expand alumni-to-policy linkages to overcome exclusion from national policy networks.

KEQ 1.5 – Effectiveness of EPP and other support mechanisms

How effective are the current strategies (e.g. EPP) and other support mechanisms in addressing these barriers?

The AAC EPP has had some success in addressing barriers to AAS access. The conversion rate from application to award offer increased to 20% for Intake 2026, compared to only 9% in earlier years, demonstrating stronger preparation and competitiveness of equity candidates. However, the Cambodia’s first Indigenous scholar (in Intake 2024) did not come via the EPP, and the mobilisation of several visually impaired awardees remain exceptional cases rather than systemic successes.

Since its expansion from a focus on women in government to all equity cohorts, the EPP has become AAC’s cornerstone inclusion strategy. It now provides ELT and IELTS support, mentoring, interview preparation, and professional development. Tailored IELTS coaching has significantly improved candidate competitiveness, reflected in the rise in equity conversion to 20% in 2026. Women and provincial candidates have particularly benefited, with provincial representation reaching 15% in Intake 2026-attesting to the ‘Dare to Dream’ campaign and all-year around promotion and outreach covering all Cambodian provinces.

However, outcomes for people with disabilities and Indigenous candidates remain inconsistent. For example, while six awardees with disabilities were selected for Intake 2026, there was only one person in

⁴ Lowering IELTS application thresholds for equity cohorts, combined with extended ELT, has precedent in other Australia Awards programs. For example, Timor-Leste recently piloted an ELT short course for people with disability in Australia, resulting in one candidate successfully meeting scholarship requirements who would not have otherwise applied.

The main risk is that candidates may still fail to achieve the required university admission score (IELTS 6.5 overall, no band less than 6.0, as per Handbook section 2.4.4), even with additional ELT support. However, the overall benefit remains significant for equity cohorts, as extended ELT builds confidence and academic readiness, even if scholarship entry is not achieved.

Timor-Leste’s country profile also demonstrates flexibility for equity candidates, allowing reduced IELTS thresholds (5.0 for Diploma/Associate Diploma and 5.5 for Bachelor applicants), which could inform AAC’s approach.

Intake 2025. Few English language providers outside Phnom Penh are equipped to meet diverse needs, and short term EPPs often cannot address deep-rooted inequities.

Importantly, EPP delivers value beyond scholarships. Many EPP participants report increased confidence, skills, and networks, even when unsuccessful in securing an award. This broader capacity-building role demonstrates EPP’s potential as a foundation for a wider equity agenda.

While AAC has pioneered disability inclusion through tailored support, mentoring, and specialised coaching, outcomes remain inconsistent due to systemic barriers. Fluctuating award numbers for candidates with disabilities reflect challenges such as limited English-language (ELT and IELTS) providers outside Phnom Penh, short-term program duration, and deep-rooted inequities that cannot be fully addressed by preparatory programs alone. These factors indicate that while the approach is innovative and impactful, further adjustments are needed to ensure consistent, sustainable inclusion across all equity cohorts.

The inconsistency suggests that the current model, while strong in design, lacks systemic reinforcement. For example, AAC’s efforts have focused on individual-level interventions rather than institutional partnerships that could scale impact. Without stronger collaboration with ministries, OPDs, and ELT providers, AAC risks continuing to deliver exceptional rather than systemic results. Addressing these gaps will require a shift from short-term fixes to long-term structural solutions, including embedding inclusive practices within Cambodia’s education and workforce systems.

Opportunities to strengthen equity of access include to:

- Extend EPP duration and geographic reach to better serve provincial, people with disabilities, and Indigenous candidates.
- Invest in systemic partnerships with ELT providers and OPDs to broaden access and support.
- Reframe EPP as not only a scholarship preparatory mechanism but also a platform for long-term leadership and professional development.

KEQ 1.6 – Opportunities to increase equity in the AAC

What opportunities exist to increase the equity of the program and strengthen the pipeline of candidates from priority groups?

AAC has made clear strides in promoting equity, but systemic barriers persist. Addressing these challenges requires moving beyond promotion and access to building structural readiness and long-term inclusion pathways. This includes consideration of interventions for specific marginalised groups, such as calibrating IELTS application thresholds for specific cohorts, peer-based mentorship and coaching, and addressing support gaps in the provision of inclusive pedagogy, accessible learning materials, and assistive technologies.

Tailored support has demonstrated impact—the AAC data shows that 60% of candidates with disabilities achieved the IELTS threshold when provided with targeted assistance. Structured pre-application interventions, such as mock interviews and writing workshops, are especially effective for provincial and Indigenous candidates. Peer mentorship within EPP has built motivation, even among unsuccessful applicants. Partnerships with OPDs, the Disability Action Council, and Indigenous associations have expanded outreach (though the latter could be consulted on a more regular basis), but provincial engagement remains underdeveloped.

DFAT recognises AAC's pioneering role in disability inclusion, creating an opportunity for AAC to model inclusive scholarship practices regionally. To realise this potential, systemic reforms are needed in both Cambodian and Australian education systems to ensure inclusive pedagogy, accessible learning materials, and assistive technologies.

Consultations with equity groups in Cambodia and lessons learned from AAS programs in other countries, indicate that opportunities to strengthen the AAC equity outcomes include to:

- Calibrate IELTS application thresholds and extend ELT for equity groups.
- Establish pre-EPP pipelines with differentiated success metrics.
- Partner with MoEYS' Special Education Department and Ministry of Rural Development for targeted outreach⁵.
- Strengthen links with other DFAT investments and their main partners to jointly identify and support the pipeline of equity candidates, through dedicated consultation and information sessions.
- Expand support beyond AAS to include short courses, graduate diplomas, and in-country scholarships for equity target groups.

KEQ 1.7 – AAC support for Cambodia's future human resource priorities

To what extent and in what ways can the next phase of AAC better respond to Cambodia's future human resource priorities, including opportunities for support in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and national Bachelor degrees?

The AAC is a flexible mechanism that is well-positioned to support Cambodia's evolving human resource development agenda, particularly in response to the Pentagonal Strategy Phase I, the DPP, and DFAT's regional priorities. Such opportunities may include, for example, the offering of AAC awards for technical and vocational education pathways and split-site Master programs.

Future directions flagged by DFAT and the RGC-including TVET pilots, split-site Masters, in-country scholarships-are consistent with Australia's *Invested* strategy. These innovations would enhance local ownership and sustainability, while deepening regional collaboration. There are, however, likely funding constraints or trade-offs (as well as consideration of additional program management capacity) that would be needed to expand the program to offer these types of awards. The level of institutional support able to be provided to scholars by Australian TVET institutions (and their arrangements with DFAT) would need to also be considered.

There is potential for the increased and more strategic use of short courses in the next phase of the AAC. The role of this modality has been demonstrated in the short courses run with funding through the MAP Building Human Capacity Pillar between 2021 to June 2024. The AAC advise that a total of 581 Cambodians (273 women, 308 men, 4 people with disability) participated in 25 activities (AA short courses, informal learning opportunities (ILOs), study tours, GBV curriculum development).

⁵ Targeted outreach through partnerships with ministries and OPDs is consistent with practices in other Australia Awards programs. For example, Australia Awards in Timor-Leste have implemented proactive strategies such as school visits to rural and remote areas, tailored sessions with development partners, and promotion through OPDs. Timor-Leste also uses billboards on major roads into the capital and local language radio programs to reach equity cohorts. These approaches demonstrate that combining institutional partnerships with community-level outreach can significantly improve visibility and application rates among underrepresented groups.

There are a wide range of scholarships provided to Cambodia by other scholarship partners. An annual meeting with the RGC and the other key donors would help to minimise overlap and gaps in the level and fields of study being supported.

Opportunities for a more flexible program include to:

- Pilot TVET-linked scholarships in priority fields e.g. green jobs, digital literacy, and climate resilience.
- Utilise split-site Master programs for cost-effective, locally relevant capacity building.
- Explore national bachelor-level or graduate diploma pathways for equity target groups as feeders into AAS.
- Expand specialised short courses linked to annually agreed DFAT and RGC workforce priorities, embedding GEDSI principles.

4. Key Findings – KEQ 2: Achievement of Outcomes

4.1. RGC Engagement and Selection

KEQ 2.1 – Increasing RGC candidate numbers

How effective are current strategies in increasing RGC candidate numbers?

The AAC have to some extent been effective in their strategies to increase RGC candidate numbers, particularly for Intake 2026. Sustaining this progress will require deeper engagement with targeted ministries, including a better understanding of the specific barriers faced by potential candidates.

RGC participation in the program is central to DFAT’s influence agenda, as alumni contribute credibility and support institutional reform, policy processes, and capacity building. In response to declining applications, AAC introduced several measures: high-level outreach via letters from the Ambassador, information sessions for RGC Human Resource departments, interview preparation training (through AAA-C and ACE), and specialist interview panels to ensure fairness. The AAC data shows that these strategies yielded results: RGC representation grew from 27% of award offers in Intake 2025 to 36% in Intake 2026, with provincial awardees doubling over the same period.

Opportunities to increase interest in the awards by RGC candidates:

- Deepen engagement with ministries strategically aligned with DFAT’s portfolio (e.g., MoEYS, MoWA, Ministry of Commerce, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation), particularly those engaged in CAPRED, ACCESS, and Ponlok Chomnes.
- Conduct a political economy assessment to better understand application incentives/disincentives, including study leave, salary continuation, and reintegration pathways for LTAs.
- Explore MoUs or secondment agreements to formalise study leave and alumni reintegration.
- Expand use of Short-Term Awards as flexible options for officials unable to leave posts for extended periods, or for those with family, disability, or English language barriers.

KEQ 2.2 – Factors behind decline in RGC candidates

What factors contribute to the declining numbers of RGC candidates, how have these changed since the MTR, and what adaptations have been made or are required?

The decline in RGC candidate numbers compared to the previous program reflects a mix of structural, political, and institutional barriers that have proven difficult to address. These barriers include the risks of career disruption, limited government reintegration policies, increased English language requirements, and competition from other scholarships with more flexible entry conditions.

The AAC data shows that the proportion of RGC awardees averaged 31% between 2019–25, down from 41% in 2014–18. Candidates face significant opportunity costs: without guaranteed salary continuation or reintegration on award completion, many risk career stagnation or loss of momentum during peak professional years. Senior officials in particular may weigh the prestige of an AAS against the risk of missing out on short-term career opportunities. Centralised RGC endorsement processes add another hurdle, especially for provincial staff with fewer networks.

Policy shifts have also shaped participation. The global increase in IELTS requirements for the AAS in 2020 skewed cohorts toward younger candidates, inadvertently excluding many mid-career government staff. At the same time, scholarships from China, Korea, Japan, and New Zealand offer less onerous entry requirements, nomination pathways, and more English language training, making them more attractive. Consultation with AAS alumni indicates that family considerations further deter some candidates: high living costs in Australia, lack of affordable accommodation, and spousal career sacrifices can make AAS less appealing for those with families.

AAC has made useful adaptations to support RGC candidates that have stabilised participation in the short term. However, these measures do not fully address the underlying structural and political barriers that continue to limit RGC uptake.

Opportunities to strengthen RGC applications include to:

- Increase provincial access to scholarship information to widen the pool beyond central ministries.
- Provide access to ELT (through AAC or other DFAT-funded mechanism) for experienced mid-career candidates (particularly those in provincial roles) so that they meet university English language entry requirements
- Advocate with RGC for clearer policies on study leave, salary continuation, and reintegration to reduce risks for mid-career officials.

4.1 Program Effectiveness

KEQ 2.3 – Effectiveness of AAC implementation

How effectively is the program being implemented to meet the intermediate and end-of-program outcomes?

The AAC is a mature, responsive, and high-performing program that is being effectively implemented throughout the scholarships cycle to meet its intended program outcomes. Ongoing adaptation has been undertaken over the program to sustain relevance and deepen systemic program outcomes and impact.⁶

Since 2018, OASIS data shows that the program has awarded 383 scholarships (368 Masters, 2 by Research, 15 PhDs) and supported the reintegration of 216 alumni. Its holistic model—covering pre-departure, study

⁶ Infographic uses data on 2024 ADIS of alumni returned within previous three years.

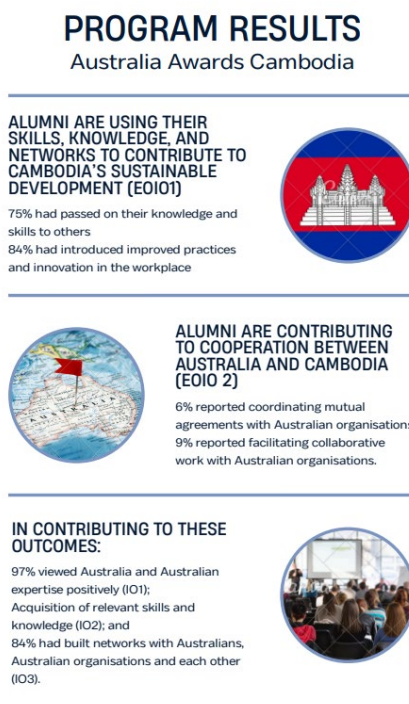
in Australia, and alumni engagement—provides a continuum of support that enhances scholar readiness, academic success, and post-award influence.

Implementation is robust and consistently rated highly in DFAT’s Investment Monitoring Reports (IMRs). The EPP is a notable innovation, improving both award outcomes and scholar preparation. Strong promotion, merit-based selection, and targeted support for marginalised groups underpin program credibility. Outcomes are evident: 99% graduation rates since 2019, high levels of scholar satisfaction (AAC pre-departure and ORIMA surveys), and strong post-award employment.

The 2024 AAC ADIS found that 89% of (recently returned) alumni secured relevant employment within six months, with many promoted on return, and nearly all applying skills and networks in support of national development priorities. The ADIS survey, the AAC database and evaluation team consultations with alumni, Cambodia organisations and DFAT show that alumni are continuing to connect with Australia and to contribute to policy reform, service delivery, and bilateral cooperation, reinforcing Australia’s profile as a trusted partner.

However, challenges remain. Rising living costs in Australia affect scholar wellbeing. The ORIMA 2024 survey found that only 52% of ongoing student agreed/strongly agreed that they were achieving a reasonable standard of living, and 34% agreed/strongly agreed that they were able to find suitable and affordable accommodation in Australia without too much difficulty . Evaluation team consultations with scholars and recently alumni indicated that this was particularly the case for those accompanied by families (approximately 15% of scholars over Intakes 2023-2025). Insurance costs were also noted as exceedingly high, especially for families, and are an out of pocket expense for scholars. Many alumni reported that they have had to navigate career transitions without structured reintegration pathways. The open field-of-study model dilutes sectoral concentration, constraining systemic influence. Evidence is also limited regarding program outcomes with respect to alumni contributing to organisational partnerships with Australia.

Figure 1: AAC Program Results



Opportunities to strengthen outcomes include to:

- Deepen institutional partnerships, exploring models used by DFAT in the Philippines and ACIAR to link awards more directly to Cambodian organisations and DFAT investments.
- Support in-Australia internships to provide awardees with valuable work experience and professional development linkages
- Strengthen structured mechanisms for reintegration pathways —such as Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with ministries, alumni placement programs, or sectoral alumni networks— to maximise the use of new skills and influence.
- Expand AAC linkages with existing scholarship schemes, such as AAF, ACIAR, MAP, and private-sector scholarships to create short courses, joint research, and professional exchanges.
- Strengthen alumni engagement, by broadening participation to include less recent AAS graduates, alumni from other DFAT programs, and self-funded alumni to amplify public diplomacy, influential linkages and development outcomes.

KEQ 2.4 – OAE and alumni activities

How effectively are OAE and alumni activities supporting scholar⁷ professional development and links with Australia?

The AAC's On-Award Enrichment and alumni activities effectively support scholars' professional development, understanding of Australia, and long-term engagement. They enhance networks, leadership capabilities, and bilateral linkages. Increased budget predictability and coordination with other Australia Awards programs could strengthen these activities, producing flow-on benefits for scholarship outcomes and alumni influence.

On-Award Enrichment: OAE has become a signature feature of the AAC scholar's experience, complementing academic study with professional and cultural development. Since 2018, AAC has hosted 126 OAE activities, reaching 272 scholars (more than half women). Between 2023–25, OAE accounted for 10–11% of AAC expenditure, with 68% of scholars participating in 2024. Activities have included sectoral conferences (EduTech, Women in Leadership Summit, Clean Energy Summit), professional networking with DFAT and alumni, mentoring, and cultural immersion (e.g., Indigenous-led walks, ideathons). AAC post-activity survey feedback is overwhelmingly positive—98% rated OAE as useful, citing gains in confidence, communication, and cross-cultural understanding.

However, opportunities for Cambodian scholars to engage socially with Australian students are more limited than in previous years. With over 40% of postgraduate coursework students at Australian universities now being international⁷, many Australian students working part-time jobs, and a growing shift toward online or blended learning, full social integration—such as informal socialising and mixing outside class—is no longer the norm for many international students. While interaction exists, it tends to be structured rather than organic, making OAE even more critical for fostering meaningful connections and cultural exchange. These experiences prepare scholars for reintegration, leadership roles, and sustained links with Australia.

Alumni Engagement: AAC's alumni programming has matured significantly, supported by 35% of the budget. Initially centred on networking, it now emphasises sectoral initiatives, ARGs (with over thirty projects), reintegration workshops (twice annually), and professional development. Flagship events (Alumni

⁷ Australian Department of Education. Higher Education Student Statistics (2023)

of the Year, 3⁰h Anniversary commemorations) and collaboration with the Australian Alumni Association of Cambodia (AAA-C) have boosted visibility. Through these activities, alumni report broader perspectives and stronger professional networks and that they are maintaining their linkages with Australia established during their scholarship. They also report a highly positive perception of Australia and its expertise. The majority of the 2024 ADIS respondents (94%) reported contributing to the cooperation between Australia and Cambodia either directly or indirectly. The direct contribution including participating, facilitating, or influencing collaborative works between Australia and Cambodia was mentioned by 31% of alumni whilst taking part in a mutual agreement between the two countries was mentioned by 3%.

The 2024 ADIS also showed that the alumni contributed indirectly toward stronger bilateral ties between the two countries through providing information or advice to Cambodians on how to go about business, education, or training opportunities in Australia (94%), informing Cambodian people about Australian expertise or resources (38%), and communicating the interests of Australia or Cambodia to their networks (25%). There is limited data on partnerships established by earlier cohorts—although it is noted that these alumni, with positive perceptions of Australian expertise as a result of their scholarship are typically in senior positions to drive such partnerships.

Table 3: Summary of OAE and Alumni Activities

| Dimension | OAE (Scholars) | Alumni Engagement |
|-----------------|---|---|
| Scope | 126 activities, 272 scholars (2018–25) | 35% budget share, 30+ research projects |
| Participation | 68% of scholars in 2024; >50% women | Broad uptake, flagship events attract 100s |
| Outcomes | Confidence, communication, networks, understanding of Australia | Reintegration, professional development, expanded networks, sectoral initiatives, policy visibility |
| Gaps | Limited reach to self-funded students | Weak sustained linkages with Australian organisations; limited data on older and self-funded alumni |
| Strategic value | Enhances scholar experience, builds understanding of Australia | Positions alumni as leaders, supports DFAT priorities, provides public diplomacy for Australian education |

Opportunities to strengthen engagement with scholars and alumni include to:

On OAE:

- Expand cooperation with AA Global Support Mechanism (AAGSM) to provide on-award enrichment for Cambodian scholars in smaller universities.
- Offer selected activities for self-funded students to build early connections with the AAC and other Cambodian AAS awardees.

Alumni Engagement:

- Conduct longitudinal studies to capture evidence on award outcomes/impact including organisational linkages of earlier cohorts of alumni.
- Secure predictable, multi-year funding to scale sector-specific initiatives and regional alumni networks.
- More structured approaches are needed to foster alumni-led collaboration between Cambodian and Australian organisations.

KEQ 2.5 – Inclusion of self-funded scholars in AAC alumni activities

What are the opportunities and challenges in including privately funded ('self-funded') scholars in AAC activities, and how have these been approached to date?

AAC has begun engaging the growing cohort of Cambodian self-funded students in Australia and Cambodia, though activities remain limited. Key challenges include difficulties in obtaining contact details, limited resources relative to the size of the cohort, uncertain student interest, and the absence of a clear targeting strategy. Selective engagement presents strategic opportunities for both AAC and Australia.

Australia remains the most popular destination for mostly-self funded Cambodian students, with over 20,000 new enrolments in Australian higher education over the past two decades⁸. The *AAC Alumni Engagement Strategy (2021–2025)* recognises the value of engaging with self-funded alumni, given their diverse networks and increasing presence across all sectors. Harnessing their skills and connections could significantly advance bilateral cooperation, promotion of the quality of Australian education, business links, and domestic reform. This inclusion of self-funded alumni is also recommended under the Invested Strategy.

In line with this potential, AAC has begun integrating the contact details of self-funded alumni (as identified) into its database and piloting targeted activities. The 2024 *Futures Analysis Training* attracted 81 applications from self-funded scholars, with 30 selected—95% of whom reported satisfaction and 88% measurable improvements in skills. Similarly, the 2025 *Ideation: Australia–Cambodia Cross-Border Challenge* included 15 self-funded participants, who reported stronger confidence and cross-cultural collaboration, directly aligning with DFAT’s economic diplomacy objectives.

Despite these successes, engagement with self-funded alumni remains constrained. As above, there are significant challenges in identifying these alumni. There is also no clear framework guiding their inclusion—whether to foster dialogue with AAS alumni, promote Australian education, or advance Australia’s influence. Resources are insufficient for wide-scale engagement, and many self-funded scholars already hold strong networks in Cambodia’s upper and middle echelons, sometimes limiting their perceived need for AAC engagement.

Without a defined and tailored strategy, there is also a risk of stretching ODA resources beyond their intended purpose. The strongest opportunities for implementing GEDSI principles remain in the pre-award phase; however, post-award GEDSI activities could be strengthened by including privately funded alumni and exposing them to AAS alumni from marginalised groups and current thinking on inclusion. Tracking privately funded alumni who engage in AAC activities is already occurring, but scaling this will have MEL implications and require clear success metrics.

Opportunities to strengthen the investment include to:

- Accelerate initiatives to identify and contact self-funded alumni through partnerships with universities, OPDs, and DFAT programs.
- Clearly articulate objectives, eligibility, responsibilities, and resourcing for engagement with self-funded scholars in the next Australian Alumni Engagement Strategy.

KEQ 2.6 – Operational challenges

What recurring operational challenges impact program delivery, and how can these be addressed?

The AAC is guided by well-established global Australia Awards systems and guidelines, and is implemented by a high performing, professionally managed managing contractor. It has a strong focus on adapting to

⁸ <https://www.education.gov.au/international-education-data-and-research/international-student-monthly-summary-and-data-tables>. Accessed 10 September 2025.

changing contexts and pro-actively addressing the challenges that arise in such a complex program and operational context. Recurring challenges include the impact of delays in approval of award offers from DFAT Canberra; staffing constraints to respond to DFAT's emerging requirements and the maintenance of database systems and data quality.

AAC has consistently scored 5s and above in DFAT Partner Performance Assessments since 2021, reflecting high standards in program delivery. The program's agile team provides tailored support to applicants, scholars and alumni, underpinning adaptive management across the scholarship cycle. Feedback from the Embassy and DFAT has been effectively addressed, with ten of fourteen 2021 MTR recommendations completed or substantively implemented. (See [Annex H](#) below.)

Table 4: Summary of Budget Breakdown, FY23-25 Averages

| Activity | % of total | Notes |
|-----------------------------------|------------|---|
| Equity Pathways Program | 6 -10% | Has been increasing, with expansion of numbers and activity |
| Australia Awards Scholarships | 34-40% | Depends on award numbers |
| On-Award Enrichment | 10-11% | Increased with rise in scholar numbers |
| Alumni Engagement | 34-37% | - |
| Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning | 3-6% | Has been increasing |
| Strategic Communications | 2-5% | - |

The program operates within a structured Risk Management Plan aligned with DFAT templates, covering all stages of the scholarship cycle and addressing high-risk issues, including fraud control, safeguarding, and counter-terrorism financing. Financial management processes have been strengthened following DFAT feedback, improving forecasting, budget management, transparency and accountability.

However, several operational constraints affect efficiency and effectiveness:

- Delays in award approval from DFAT Canberra: Late intake approvals risk delayed ELT commencement, particularly impacting equity candidates' ability to meet IELTS thresholds.
- Staffing and funding pressures: The program's full workload capacity limits responsiveness to emerging DFAT priorities or expanded program requests. Retention of experienced staff in this last year until program end in mid-2026 is also a concern.
- Data systems limitations: OASIS functionality is insufficient to manage the full scholarship cycle, requiring the program to maintain multiple databases and increasing the risk of data inconsistencies.
- Alumni engagement and data quality: Challenges are experienced in making contact with self-funded alumni and in maintaining accurate contact with alumni, particularly as graduates progress in their careers.

Additional gaps include:

- Limited proactive risk mitigation for ELT delays, particularly for equity cohorts, which undermines GEDSI objectives and conversion rates.
- Insufficient integration of alumni tracking across systems, reducing efficiency and limiting outcome-level insights for DFAT reporting and public diplomacy.
- Lack of structured coordination with other DFAT programs (e.g., CAPRED, ACCESS, Ponlok Chomnes), which constrains opportunities for joint candidate identification and reintegration planning.
- MEL system limitations for expanded alumni engagement, as current frameworks do not anticipate differentiated success metrics for privately funded cohorts.

- Workforce continuity risks without a clear succession or knowledge transfer strategy, which could affect program handover and stakeholder relationships.

Opportunities to strengthen the investment:

- Coordinate with the Post to clarify staffing priorities, responsibilities, and funding allocations to respond to emerging requirements. This includes with respect to retaining key personnel or novation of staff during the transition period to ensure continued support to the Australia Awardees and maintain relationships with key stakeholders.
- Clarify implementation autonomy, establishing clear agreements on what the managing contractor can implement following acceptance of annual and risk management plans, reducing unnecessary delays.
- Streamline award approvals, maintaining close liaison with DFAT Canberra to expedite approvals; consider provisional ELT commencement to mitigate delays.
- Enhance data systems and continuity, improving documentation, cross-program learning, and internal briefings to strengthen coherence, continuity, and preparation for program handover.
- Alumni tracking and engagement, developing strategies and systems to maintain contact with AAS alumni and to establish contact with self-funded alumni, enhancing data quality and supporting post-award outcomes. The Office of Southeast Asia has reported some innovative examples from Ho Chi Minh City Post and Kuala Lumpur Post in engaging data and human resource service providers to source alumni profiles from LinkedIn and other public sources.

4.2 Monitoring and Learning

KEQ 2.7 – MEL system effectiveness

How well does the current MEL system capture and use data in ways that improve the AAC overall?

The AAC Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning system successfully captures and uses program data to manage the program throughout the scholarships cycle. Adaptive program MEL generates the required data for reporting to DFAT Cambodia, for annual disaggregated GEDSI reporting for the global Australia Awards and for reporting on Australia's Development Tier 2 Results. Given the variety of supporting databases and spreadsheets, data consistency is a challenge. Further collection and analysis of data on less recent alumni would contribute to learning and reporting on award outcomes and impact.

The AAC MEL system is a program strength, with expenditure of 3–6% of activity costs between 2023–2025, aligning with DFAT Design and M&E Standards (4–7% of program budgets). Core data platforms include: DFAT's OASIS for university placements, award offers, and academic progress/completions; the strengthened AAC alumni database; and a newly established AAC on-award engagement database. Some datasets (applications, selections, alumni participation, EPP) remain in Excel spreadsheets, creating potential data inconsistencies.

Quantitative data is complemented by surveys and feedback tools, including ORIMA on-arrival and ongoing awardee surveys, and AAC reintegration and ADIS surveys, tailored event feedback, and evaluative case studies. These data collections capture a rich picture of scholar journeys, skill development, and contributions to national development. The system is particularly strong in GEDSI data collection, enabling disaggregated analysis by gender, disability, and geography. The program has increasingly used local alumni in conducting MEL activities.

Despite these strengths, reporting remains heavily activity focused. Outcome-level evidence—especially on alumni from earlier cohorts, short-term awards, and on alumni-led cooperation between Cambodia and Australian institutions is limited. AAC MEL reporting is detailed, with DFAT Post requesting more synthesised, accessible briefs to support strategic decision-making and external diplomacy.

Opportunities to strengthen program MEL:

- Conduct a longitudinal study of earlier alumni cohorts to better capture long-term outcomes, particularly on institutional cooperation (EOIO 2).
- Improve data integration across platforms, reducing reliance on multiple spreadsheets and ensuring data quality and consistency in reporting and trend monitoring.
- Develop standardised briefing templates, dashboards, and data visualisations to improve accessibility and usability of MEL findings for DFAT Post and stakeholders.

KEQ 2.8 – Integration of M&E findings into AAC adaptations

To what extent have M&E findings been integrated into AAC adaptations?

MEL findings are actively integrated into program activity design and adaptation, informing strategies across equity, outreach, training, and alumni support. The program demonstrates a strong culture of learning, embedding evidence into operational decisions and program enhancements.

There are many examples of use of M&E findings leading to AAC adaptations. These include:

- the AAC analysis of application trends and the EPP review shaped AAC’s equity strategies, prompting targeted outreach, mock interview training, hybrid learning for provincial students, and enhanced mentoring.
- Data on barriers faced by provincial candidates and people with disabilities informed differentiated ELT and mentoring support.
- Alumni survey feedback and case studies guided the development of ARGs, reintegration workshops, and professional development opportunities.
- Monitoring of RGC participation led to tailored application and interview support, contributing to an uptick in provisional RGC awardees for Intake 2026.
- Similarly, the ARG review recommendations prompted diversification of alumni grants, extended application timelines, structured feedback for unsuccessful applications, and follow-up studies for sustainability.

AAC internal “Review, Reflect & Adapt” workshops reinforce this culture, facilitating regular reflection on MEL data by staff. External sharing of findings with DFAT Post occurs, though this could be more systematic to support broader program consolidation and strategic planning.

Opportunities to strengthen MEL utilisation:

- Expand alumni-led MEL initiatives and case studies to reinforce local ownership and contextual relevance of evidence.
- Strengthen systematic use of MEL insights for strategic alignment with DFAT’s program priorities in Cambodia.
- Share MEL data with Cambodian stakeholders, enhancing transparency and supporting locally led decision-making.

KEQ 2.9 – Adequacy of AAC alumni database

To what extent does M&E capture and inform alumni engagement activities and contribute to a robust, interactive and expanded alumni database?

The AAC has transitioned its alumni database onto a more robust platform, supporting increasingly structured and strategic alumni engagement. Expansion to include self-funded alumni is underway, with potential to integrate AAS short course, AAF, and ACIAR alumni records. Enhanced database functionality, such as interactive dashboards and DFAT access, will enable real-time utilisation for engagement and reporting.

AAC's alumni engagement has matured into a structured and increasingly strategic function. It is supported by the launch of a new alumni database in 2024/5 (on a database platform rather than less reliable spreadsheets). This has enhanced tracking and reporting, improving accountability to DFAT Cambodia and reporting for global AAS MEL. There is still however work to be done in ensuring completeness of the database, accuracy of entries and data quality.

As of 2025, the alumni database contains 1,625 records of AAS, MAP and other short-course alumni giving DFAT and AAC access to an increasingly consolidated picture of Cambodia's Australia Awards community. Touchpoints for ongoing engagement and digital platforms, such as LinkedIn, provide data on alumni career trajectories. It is, however, labour intensive to harness and update on the alumni database. The AAC have therefore initially focused on collecting employment data for the most influential alumni.

As noted in KEQ 2.4, the database does not currently include records of the nearly 700 AAF and ACIAR alumni. The database does however now contain the records of 385 self-funded alumni (increased from 197 in 2019), populated through stronger outreach, improved tracking systems and voluntary registration. The relatively low numbers of self-funded alumni on the database (compared to the numbers graduating each year from Australian universities) reflect the challenges in identifying the alumni, getting their contact details. It is understood that the database would be directly accessible by the DFAT Post in September 2025.

Opportunities to enhance the alumni database include to:

- Include AAF, ACIAR fellows on the alumni database.
- Accelerate efforts to record self-funded alumni on the database.
- Complete the data quality assurance following data migration from the old alumni system.
- Link the separate spreadsheet on AAS alumni attendance at events with the alumni database, so that there is not double counting of alumni participation.
- Consider establishing a role in the new design for a data quality manager, given the system complexities and the ongoing need for data collection/updates.

4.3 Public Diplomacy and Influence

KEQ 2.10 – Contribution of the AAC to Australia's public diplomacy

How effectively does AAC support and contribute to Post's public diplomacy objectives?

The AAC effectively supports the Post's public diplomacy objectives by fostering alumni engagement, promoting Australia's education system, and generating visibility for Australian expertise, culture, and values. Alumni act as credible messengers and informal ambassadors, while program outputs contribute to promotion of DFAT's bilateral cooperation and thematic priorities including for climate resilience and

inclusion. Alignment with Embassy strategic planning could be further strengthened by introducing a structured annual planning mechanism. This could include a joint AAC–Embassy “Strategic Alignment Workshop” at the start of each calendar year to review Embassy priorities, identify thematic focus areas (e.g., climate diplomacy, economic engagement, GEDSI), and agree on shared targets for alumni engagement and public diplomacy activities. Documenting these priorities in an annual plan would ensure clarity, accountability, and coherence across the portfolio.

AAC is recognised by the stakeholders consulted by the evaluation team as a flagship program for Cambodia due to its inclusive merit-based selection, relevance to Cambodia’s development priorities, and the opportunities it provides for individual career growth. Alumni report high satisfaction, pride, belonging, and value the program’s flexibility to choose high-quality courses and universities in Australia.

Alumni also act as informal ambassadors, promoting Australian education and bilateral ties. The 2024 ADIS found that 88% of recently returned AAS alumni shared information on Australian education, business opportunities, or talent. Alumni networks expand career pathways, sector collaboration, and influence, with improved knowledge of GEDSI (89%) and climate change (78%).

Between 2023–2025, 2–5% of activity expenditure was allocated to strategic communications. Strategic communications and events—such as the 3⁰th Anniversary campaign, alumni awards, and visibility in DFAT thematic events—enhance Australia’s profile. Online engagement is strong, with over 113,000 interactions on Facebook and LinkedIn followers reaching 9,122 in the first half of 2025.

Opportunities to strengthen the investment:

- Diversify AAC alumni storytelling to reflect a broader range of sectors and backgrounds.
- Embed alumni profiles more systematically in DFAT strategic communications, aligning narratives with thematic and policy priorities.
- Leverage interactive digital platforms to strengthen real-time engagement and monitor public diplomacy impact.
- Introduce a structured annual AAC–Embassy “Strategic Alignment Workshop” to review Embassy priorities, identify thematic focus areas (e.g., climate diplomacy, economic engagement, GEDSI), and agree on shared targets for alumni engagement and public diplomacy activities. Document these priorities in an annual plan to ensure clarity, accountability, and coherence across the portfolio.

KEQ 2.11 – Alumni as influential leaders

To what extent are alumni emerging as influential leaders in their respective sectors?

AAS alumni are increasingly visible as influential leaders and changemakers across Cambodia’s public, private, and civil society sectors, including in fields that align closely with Cambodia’s reform agenda and DFAT’s investment priorities. However, male alumni are significantly more likely to be in prominent and emerging leadership roles than the female alumni, highlighting a gender gap in leadership outcomes.

The AAC alumni database shows that **over 55 alumni (80% male)** hold prominent senior government positions, including Director Generals, Secretaries of State, and advisors across ministries. At least 15 alumni lead NGOs shaping policy and service delivery in disability inclusion, climate resilience, and youth empowerment. There are also at least 135 alumni in emerging leadership roles (**76% male**), occupying key roles in research institutes and private sector companies. Influence is concentrated in economic and

finance, education, agriculture, health, and national banking sectors, reflecting alignment with reform priorities.

AAC data on the leadership roles held by earlier alumni cohorts is not comprehensive, however it might be expected that with career progression many of the alumni are now in senior leadership roles in their sector.

Opportunities to strengthen the investment:

- Conduct longitudinal studies to track alumni career trajectories and institutional impact over time.
- Develop thematic case studies documenting alumni contributions to sectoral reform, policy change, and institutional development.
- Introduce targeted leadership development initiatives for female alumni, such as mentoring programs, executive coaching, and networking opportunities with senior leaders, to address gender disparities and accelerate women’s progression into leadership roles.

KEQ 2.12 – Opportunities to strengthen diplomatic contribution of alumni

What opportunities exist to strengthen the AAC’s contribution to Australia’s broader diplomatic objectives?

AAS alumni represent a strategic diplomatic asset for Australia with strong connections to Australia as a result of their scholarship. This asset is already being harnessed, but would be strengthened by systems that facilitate increased awareness across the Embassy as to which Cambodians in position of influence have been scholarship holders. This would be further heightened by awareness as to which Australian government (and self-funded) leaders have connections in Australia.

The AAC alumni database now contains summary profiles of the 100 most influential alumni, which can be accessed by the Embassy for events, thematic campaigns, and high-level engagements. Greater clarity on how different alumni cohorts (DFAT sponsored/self-funded, long- and short- term study) contribute to Embassy priorities could unlock further diplomatic value. The Embassy use of alumni for strategic communications, policy dialogue, and regional diplomacy is growing, but planning and coordination with the AAC and within the Embassy could be enhanced.

Lessons from other AAS programs, such as Timor-Leste, show practical approaches to tracking alumni influence: (a) convenience-based tracking through alumni engagement with managing contractors and associations; (b) biennial alumni update surveys; and (c) an ADIS survey every three years for all alumni, not just newly returned. Timor-Leste also uses this data to review alumni influence and advise Post accordingly. Adopting similar mechanisms in Cambodia would strengthen Embassy awareness and enable more strategic use of alumni in diplomacy.

Opportunities for policy engagement include leveraging alumni expertise in thematic areas such as climate governance, digital regulation, inclusive education, and economic reform. Alumni could be convened for annual policy dialogues, sectoral roundtables, and technical working groups co-chaired by ministries and alumni leaders. These platforms would position alumni as credible contributors to Cambodia’s reform agenda while reinforcing Australia’s role as a trusted development partner.

Opportunities to strengthen the investment:

- Ensure whole-of-Embassy familiarity with alumni where possible through expanded and accessible profiles.
- Align AAC messaging with Embassy campaigns and thematic priorities.

- Convene dialogues, roundtables, or high-level visits involving alumni to support policy influence and bilateral cooperation.
- Strengthen cross-program initiatives with CAPRED, ACCESS, Ponlok Chomnes, and Aus4ASEAN to integrate alumni into sectoral reform, policy engagement and knowledge-sharing activities.
- Expand alumni roles in strategic communications, policy dialogue, and regional diplomacy to maximise Australia’s influence in Cambodia.
- Introduce systematic alumni influence tracking (e.g., biennial alumni update surveys and triennial ADIS for all alumni) and use this data to inform Embassy strategic planning and engagement priorities.
- Establish alumni-led policy platforms in priority sectors, supported by small grants and co-hosted by relevant ministries, to institutionalise alumni contributions to policy development and reform.

5. Key Findings - KEQ 3: Sustainability and Alumni Engagement

5.1 Alumni Engagement & Sustainability

KEQ 3.1 – Balancing engagement with alumni

How effective are the alumni engagement activities in maintaining the existing alumni and attracting newly returned alumni? To what extent do alumni continue to engage with the program?

The AAC invests in targeted alumni engagement through a diverse range of professional, social, and family-oriented activities, achieving strong participation among recent alumni. Recent alumni tend to be more enthusiastic about engaging and building networks, as they have just returned and remain closely connected to their study experience. In contrast, engagement among longer-standing alumni is more variable, often influenced by competing professional and personal priorities. This highlights the importance of developing strategic approaches to sustain meaningful engagement across different alumni cohorts.

Engagement with less recent alumni is variable, reflecting competing career priorities and potentially weakening ties with Australia. Evidence of this trend includes lower participation rates in alumni association activities and reduced attendance at AAC events among earlier cohorts, as noted in consultations and AAC participation data. Strategic prioritisation is essential to balance support across cohorts while maintaining AAC’s merit- and equity-driven identity.

AAC alumni programming has expanded through quality activities that align with DFAT’s Embassy and Global AA alumni engagement strategies: to connect, mobilise, and celebrate. Activities include professional development workshops, sectoral seminars, reunions, welcome homes, reintegration workshops, and flagship events like the Alumni of the Year awards.

Participation has scaled up over the past two years, from 17 activities with 854 participants in 2023 to 21 activities with 1,480 participants in 2024. Recent alumni see benefit from the professional development activities provided by the AAC and are enthusiastic to engage in activities which enhances their professional networks and sense of belonging. Consultation with less recent alumni indicates that these earlier cohorts have time constraints from their professional and personal commitments, so their engagement with the AAC and time to maintain connections with Australia is more variable.

There are only 385 self-funded alumni registered on the AAC database. Limited contact information, differing engagement motivations, and resource constraints make broad inclusion challenging. Engagement strategies for this cohort may need a more exclusive, targeted approach, with careful consideration of the use of ODA funds for this cohort of alumni.

Opportunities to strengthen the investment:

- Introduce a QR code registration system (like used by the Jakarta Post) to facilitate data collection across all alumni, including self-funded alumni.
- Conduct a mapping exercise to identify the engagement preferences of various alumni groups.
- Update the Australian Alumni Engagement Strategy to define objectives, outcomes, target cohorts, and funding allocation for self-funded alumni engagement.
- Facilitate participation of Cambodian alumni in regionally organised activities.
- Promote thematic Communities of Practice (CoPs) to sustain cross-cohort engagement and professional collaboration.
- Develop targeted leadership and networking initiatives for female alumni to support their progression into senior roles, addressing gender gaps in influence and visibility.

KEQ 3.2 – Alignment of AAC activities with alumni aspirations

To what extent are alumni engagement activities aligned with participants' professional aspirations and development and links with Australia?

AAC alumni engagement activities align well with alumni aspirations, offering professional development, networking, sectoral mentoring, and links to Australia. Women alumni have been a key focus in early years of AAC, with programming designed to enhance leadership, confidence, and career progression. Strong demand and positive participant feedback demonstrate high alignment with alumni interests.

The engagement activities include workshops on mental health, futures analysis, public speaking, research design through a social inclusion lens, sectoral mentoring, ARGs, international conference participation, and Australian professional association memberships. Leadership and gender-inclusive initiatives include Women in Leadership programs, Executive Skills workshops, and Regional Women's Leadership Initiatives.

Feedback indicates these activities enhance professional skills, confidence, and visibility in policy dialogues. Participation demand consistently exceeds available places, underscoring the need for strategic prioritisation based on sectoral relevance, career stage, and alignment with DFAT priorities.

However, the evaluation identified gaps in reintegration support, particularly for alumni from the private sector and open category who often need to find new employment upon return. While government alumni generally return to their previous roles and leverage networks for promotion, private sector alumni face greater uncertainty. Other AAS programs, such as Timor-Leste, address this through structured reintegration planning and alumni-led job-matching initiatives. AAC does not currently track what percentage of alumni must seek new employment, but consultations with the current awardees suggest this is a significant challenge for non-government cohorts. Strengthening reintegration support to include career guidance, job placement assistance, and sector-specific networking would help address this gap.

Opportunities to strengthen the investment:

- Expand reintegration support to help alumni access relevant employment through alumni networks, DFAT investments, and partner organisations.

- Leverage alumni-led initiatives to reinforce locally led development and create activities relevant to diverse cohorts.
- Develop a prioritisation framework for alumni activities, considering sectoral relevance, leadership potential, and alignment with DFAT thematic priorities.

KEQ 3.3 – AAA-C membership and effectiveness

Is membership of the AAA-C open to all graduates, not just AAC? How effective has the AAAC been and what measures are relevant to consider in future?

The AAA-C is open to all Cambodian graduates from accredited Australian institutions who have completed at least one year of study and obtained a formal higher education qualification (diploma, bachelor, graduate certificate, master, or doctorate). In practice, however, membership and leadership remain dominated by AAS alumni, and this imbalance—combined with membership fees, brand overlap with AAC, and reliance on AAC support—has contributed to persistent perceptions of exclusivity among self-funded alumni. This dynamic limits the association’s reach and the broader diplomatic and developmental value that a fully inclusive alumni platform could generate.

The AAA-C is governed by a volunteer Board, elected every two years at the Annual Congress, with general members eligible both to stand for leadership roles and vote. While this structure is consistent with locally led principles, AAA-C’s operational capacity is constrained by its volunteer nature. Board members balance professional and personal responsibilities and are unable to run a sustained program of activities without significant logistical, administrative, and event-management support from AAC—which in effect operates as the association’s ‘back office.’ This reliance on program support blurs the boundary between an alumni-led association and a DFAT-supported platform, reinforcing misunderstandings about its independence and mandate.

While the charter is inclusive, the predominance of AAS alumni in leadership and membership perpetuates perceptions of exclusivity. The association’s visibility and influence are also affected by branding overlap with the AAC, contributing to misunderstandings among alumni and external stakeholders regarding about its roles and responsibilities and independence. Annual membership fees (US\$30 standard, US\$200 lifetime) may further restrict participation by self-funded alumni or those with limited resources.

Value of AAA-C

Despite these operational constraints, AAA-C provides meaningful value as Cambodia’s primary professional and social network for Australian-educated graduates. Its contributions include:

- acting as a locally led platform for peer networking, continuing professional development, and knowledge-sharing among alumni from diverse sectors;
- supporting the visibility of Australia’s investment in human capital through public events, community engagement, and representation at official Embassy functions;
- providing a mechanism—albeit uneven—for maintaining engagement with earlier cohorts of AAS alumni and connecting them with newer graduates;
- offering DFAT and the Embassy access to a respected group of professionals who can contribute to policy dialogues, sectoral events, or public diplomacy initiatives.

However, the association’s value remains under-realised. Engagement among self-funded alumni, AAF/ACIAR fellows, and private-sector leaders is limited, leadership pipelines are narrow, and AAA-C is not yet positioned as a broad-based professional network of the scale seen in Vietnam, Indonesia, or the

Philippines. Strengthening AAA-C’s locally led governance, strategic focus, and operational support will be critical to unlocking its full contribution in the next phase.

Key Considerations for Future Sustainability

Key considerations for sustainability of the association include (to be explored during the design phase):

- Can AAA-C evolve to genuinely represent all Australian alumni in Cambodia—including non-AAS and self-funded graduates—rather than functioning de facto as an AAS alumni body?
- Can a volunteer-run structure effectively support the level of engagement expected of a strategic partner in DFAT’s development, economic diplomacy, and public diplomacy agendas?
- What are the benefits and risks of reinstating a DFAT-funded Secretariat or partial Secretariat to provide stable operational support while preserving alumni ownership?
- Is financial independence through membership fees, sponsorship, or partnerships realistic given Cambodia’s alumni demographics?
- How can AAA-C’s branding and communications be clarified to emphasise its independence from AAC while maintaining alignment with Embassy objectives?

Opportunities to strengthen the investment:

- Update the Australian Alumni Engagement Strategy to clearly define AAA-C objectives, brand, governance, membership criteria, funding and operational support from AAC.
- Develop targeted initiatives to meaningfully engage self-funded and non-AAS alumni (such as more exclusive networking opportunities with visiting Australian delegations and business leaders).
- Introduce targeted leadership development programs for female alumni to accelerate progression into senior roles, addressing gender disparities in influence and visibility.
- Clarify branding distinctions between AAA-C and AAC (e.g., using “Australian Alumni Cambodia” for association-wide events) to reduce confusion about purpose and independence.
- Explore models used in Vietnam, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Timor-Leste—where alumni associations operate as broad-based professional platforms supported by strategic DFAT facilitation but with strong local leadership—for possible adaptation to Cambodia.

Overall, AAA-C remains a valuable platform with significant untapped potential. Strengthening its governance, inclusivity, and operational capacity—while reinforcing its identity as a locally led, independent association—will be essential if it is to serve as a credible, representative, and sustainable partner in Australia’s ongoing engagement with Cambodian alumni.

KEQ 3.4 – Alignment of Alumni Research Grants with DFAT investments

How effectively do Alumni Research Grants complement other DFAT programs and priorities?

AAC ARGs complement DFAT priorities in climate change, health, and GEDSI, fostering alumni research capacity, cross-program learning, and policy visibility. ARGs have high inclusivity, but challenges remain in mentorship, research utilisation, and alignment with other knowledge-sector initiatives.

Introduced in 2021, the ARGs support alumni to conduct research in areas of national and DFAT priority. Over three grant rounds, 31 projects have been awarded: 13 climate change, 9 GEDSI, and 9 health. These have included research into climate-smart agriculture, disability-inclusive health systems, and gender equity in education.

The 2024 AAC Case Study Evaluation found that ARGs strengthen individual and institutional research capacity and position alumni as thought leaders. However, supervision and quality assurance remain limited, and the overlap with the functions of Ponlok Chomnes have raised questions about added value. Dissemination events and collaborations with programs like CAPRED, ACCESS, and Ponlok Chomnes have amplified policy visibility and cross-program learning. However, many projects conclude at the research stage, limiting translation into policy pilots or institutional reforms.

Opportunities to strengthen the investment

- Involve Ponlok Chomnes expertise in ARG project selection, design, mentoring, and dissemination of findings to strengthen alignment with sectoral research priorities.
- Provide targeted training and supervision to grantees to enhance research quality and maximise alumni capacity building.
- Establish formal pathways for the findings from the ARGs to feed into DFAT programming and sectoral dialogue.
- Consider funding follow-up studies or pilot initiatives to extend impact and evidence utilisation.
- Engage alumni from ACIAR funded research programs as an untapped resource to support ARG implementation and scaling.

6. Evaluation Summary and Strategic Recommendations

6.1. Relevance

The AAC program remains highly relevant to both Cambodia's national development priorities and DFAT's strategic objectives. It is strongly aligned with the RGC's *Pentagonal Strategy*, the DFAT DPP, and regional commitments to inclusive growth, climate resilience, and digital transformation. The program has more recently broadened its award offers to these strategic objectives but also to reflect increasingly strong candidates in emerging and future-facing sectors such as climate science, AI, and fintech. Despite these gains, strategic consultation with Cambodian institutions regarding award targeting has been limited, and although there has been increasing outreach to provincial candidates, structural barriers continue to restrict access for marginalised groups, particularly Indigenous Cambodians and people with disability.

Looking ahead, the next phase should deepen locally led development by systematically involving Cambodian ministries, universities, the private sector and civil society in priority-setting and alumni support to better achieve program outcomes.

Harmonising AAC activities more firmly within DFAT's broader portfolio, particularly CAPRED, ACCESS, and Ponlok Chomnes, would ensure coherence and cross-program impact. To secure long-term funding sustainability, DFAT should also explore co-funding models with the RGC to strengthen funding sustainability and demonstrate shared ownership.

A stronger focus on TVET (taking the example of Hanoi Post) would also enhance alignment with Cambodia's human capital needs. Without increased program funding establishing a TVET stream of awards would mean potential trade-offs in the offer of awards at postgraduate level. Emerging TVET aspirations could perhaps be more effectively supported through a targeted suite of short course offerings, or integration with plans under CAPRED. The design of the next phase of AAC provides the opportunity to assess and determine directions for supporting increased TVET sector capability.

6.2. Effectiveness

AAC has delivered consistently strong results. Alumni are contributing significantly to national development —with 84% reporting the introduction of improved practices. There are over 55 AAS alumni (80% male) holding prominent senior government positions and leading NGOs shaping policy and service delivery in disability inclusion, climate resilience, and youth empowerment. Over 135 alumni (76% male), are also employed in emerging leadership roles.

The EPP has strengthened access pathways for under-represented equity groups. Scholar satisfaction with their studies and their experience in Australia is high, with a near-perfect graduation rate. On-award enrichment activities have helped Cambodian awardees to better understand Australia and Australians, and to form professional development linkages, although more could be achieved with enhanced coordination with AAC programs in other countries and through the AAGSM.

The strategic actions under the Australian Alumni Engagement Strategy (2021–2025) have largely been implemented, with the majority of the success indicators of the strategy’s objectives achieved. Program engagement with, and support of alumni, has matured, expanding through annual celebrations of alumni achievements, networking events, sectoral initiatives and the ARGs. Social media monitoring of promotional campaign shows evidence of high levels of interest and participation. There has been ongoing senior level Post engagement with alumni. However, whilst the strategy is intended to cover all Cambodian graduates from an Australian university or vocational training centre (long-term and short-course), the identification of, and making contact with, self-funded alumni (as in common with other AAS countries) continues to be time-consuming and not particularly effective. Program engagement with older cohorts and self-funded alumni is also uneven. AusCham noted that alumni engagement, especially linkages with privately funded alumni, this is an untapped network for them. In particular, Engagement is also complicated by perceptions that the AAA-C exclusively serves AA alumni, with branding often confused with AAC, reinforcing this perception.

Alumni are directly contributing to cooperation with Australia through participating, facilitating, or influencing collaborative works (mentioned by 31% of the ADIS 2024 alumni).

Entering into a mutual agreement between the two countries at an organisational level was however reported by only 3% of the recently completing alumni⁹. The reasons for this low level of engagement are not captured by the survey. However, an explanation may be that these alumni are in lower role levels that are not in a position to be able to influence such engagement. Whilst there is limited data on the partnerships established by earlier cohorts, these alumni have positive perceptions of Australian expertise as a result of their scholarship, and are typically in more senior positions to drive such partnerships. Further consultation and analysis is needed to strengthen results regarding institutional level partnership outcomes.

Alumni also contribute indirectly toward stronger bilateral ties through providing information to other Cambodians on Australian business opportunities, education, expertise and resources.

Beyond program outcomes, the impact of alumni on institutional reform and national development remains under-examined. Systematic longitudinal studies and thematic case studies would provide evidence on alumni influence over time and help inform both Cambodian stakeholders and DFAT policy.

⁹ Low levels of organisational engagement are also reported in the ADIS surveys of other comparable ASEAN countries.

Under the new design, the program should sharpen thematic and sectoral targeting to build critical mass in areas of strategic importance, while maintaining flexibility to respond to Cambodia’s evolving development priorities. To ensure this flexibility, targeting should be informed through an annual—or biennial, if more feasible—multi-stakeholder targeting workshop. This forum would bring together RGC ministries, employers, OPDs, universities, DFAT implementing partners, and the Embassy/AAC to jointly review priority fields, discuss system needs, reflect on returning alumni experiences, examine program outcomes, and capture lessons learned. Such a structured mechanism would embed locally led development, build on the softer consultative approach demonstrated in the 2024 IMR, and strengthen the relationship between the Embassy, AAC, and personnel departments across ministries in identifying emerging skills gaps. In parallel, the program should broaden modalities by expanding the use of short courses for professionals unable to leave work or family commitments for long periods, for people with disability, and for candidates who do not yet meet the English language requirements for postgraduate study. Future programming should strengthen collaboration with Ponlok Chomnes to align research with broader DFAT investments, resource follow-up initiatives that move research evidence into policy or practice.

The forthcoming update of the Australian Alumni Engagement Strategy for Cambodia should set out clear objectives, targeting, and funding priorities. A whole of Embassy approach where possible to developing and implementing the strategy would facilitate the effective balancing and targeting of development program objectives for alumni engagement with public diplomacy, policy dialogue, and economic partnership objectives. Increased AAC/DFAT engagement with other Australian-educated Cambodians (such as AAF, ACIAR and self-funded) would strengthen the overall alumni ecosystem and amplify policy and institutional impact. Such outreach and integration would be facilitated by rebranding of the AAA-C to clarify its inclusivity.

6.3. Efficiency

Program delivery has been efficient and adaptive, with high DFAT performance ratings and a strong capacity to respond to program learning and contextual shifts. Since the 2021 MTR, financial planning, MEL reporting, and the alumni and on-award engagement database systems have all been strengthened. Yet efficiency is hampered by recurrent challenges: delays in DFAT Canberra approvals of award offers, staffing constraints to undertake emerging activities, and the resources to keep databases up-to-date. Fragmentation across OASIS, alumni and other database platforms continues to reduce real-time data use.

Going forward, consolidating MEL and alumni databases into an integrated system with interactive dashboards would improve data quality for program management, reporting and learning. Early commencement of English language training for provisional candidates could mitigate approval delays. Clearer delegation of responsibilities between DFAT Post and the managing contractor would also help reduce bottlenecks and ensure efficient implementation through to program closure in mid-2026.

6.4. Cross-Cutting Objectives

Given the institutional challenges faced by marginalised Cambodians, AAC has made commendable progress in advancing its inclusion objectives. Women now comprise 56% of the 2026 intake, tailored support has enabled most candidates with disability to meet IELTS thresholds, and the first Indigenous scholar was mobilised in 2024. However, ongoing structural barriers persist in pedagogy and accessibility for people with disability studying in Australia, and reintegration into the Cambodian workforce for all the equity target groups. Expanding the EPP to include career development support and non-scholarship pathways, recalibrating IELTS thresholds for equity cohorts, and forging stronger partnerships with OPDs and Indigenous associations will be critical in sustaining progress.

With respect to climate change, the AAC has integrated climate resilience into its award offerings and the ARGs, but within the context of a program with broad objectives, these contributions remain modest in scale. The offering of targeted short courses, enhanced linkages between AAS, AAF and ACIAR alumni working in climate change areas and the integration of alumni into Australia’s regional climate diplomacy efforts would lead to stronger outcomes in this area.

6.5. Learning and Adaptation

The AAC MEL system successfully captures and uses program data to manage the program throughout the scholarships cycle. Program MEL generates the required data for reporting to DFAT Cambodia, for the global AA and on Australia’s Development Tier 2 Results. A strong culture of reflection, learning and adaptive management has been established. “Review, Reflect & Adapt” workshops, the development of alumni-led case studies, and the integration of MEL findings into program adjustments illustrate this commitment. The majority of the MTR recommendations have been fully or substantially implemented, with others subject to active discussion between the AAC and the DFAT Post.

However, there is scope to embed learning more systematically—not only to inform program delivery but also to provide DFAT with clearer visibility of key program metrics, implementation challenges, program successes and outcomes. This would strengthen DFAT’s ability to make evidence-informed decisions and meet its own reporting requirements. Priorities for the next phase should include synthesised analytical reporting to key stakeholders to reinforce local ownership, upgrading AAC systems to provide real-time interactive dashboards, and conducting longitudinal studies to track systemic and institutional impact.

6.6. Strategic Recommendations for the Next Phase of the AAC

Taken together, these findings suggest that the next phase of AAC should move beyond a scholarship delivery mechanism toward a more integrated platform for human capital and institutional development. Drawing on evidence from this evaluation, inclusive consultations, and lessons from other Australia Awards programs ([Annex A](#)), the following strategic directions are recommended for the next phase of AAC from 2026:

1. Embed locally led development principles more systematically.

Ensure structured Cambodian stakeholder input across the award cycle, particularly in identifying critical knowledge and skill gaps and informing the targeting approach. Strengthen partnerships with priority organisations that align with Australia’s strategic objectives in Cambodia. This includes formalising partnership agreements (e.g., MoUs) with ministries, universities, civil society organisations, and OPDs to:

- co-identify high-quality candidates;
- maintain employer contact with scholars while on-award; and
- support structured reintegration, knowledge utilisation, and career progression upon return.

2. Consolidate sectoral and thematic focus to maximise critical mass and system influence.

Current broad field-of-study patterns dilute impact and limit the program’s ability to shape sectoral outcomes. The next phase should therefore:

- define a focused set of priority sectors (e.g., climate resilience, digital economy, public service reform, TVET) based on evidence and stakeholder consultations, and by reference to the sectors nominated for Cambodia in the Invested Strategy;
- ensure flexibility through periodic (annual or biennial) targeting workshops that jointly review emerging Cambodian priorities;
- integrate these sectors with DFAT's investments in Cambodia and the region, so alumni skills feed directly into ongoing reforms; and
- align short courses and long-term awards to reinforce sectoral ecosystems rather than operate as standalone opportunities.

Further detail on the recommended targeting approach is provided in [Annex B](#).

3. Introduce fit-for-purpose and cost-effective modalities to expand access and relevance.

To reach more diverse professional cohorts and support inclusive participation, the next phase should consider adoption of a suite of cost-effective, context-appropriate modalities, such as:

- in-country or partially in-country scholarships for people with disabilities and Indigenous Cambodians, in partnership with accessible universities;
- targeted short courses for mid-career professionals and provincial staff unable to undertake long-term study;
- extended English language pathways, including pre-IELTS preparation, conditional offer arrangements, and inclusive testing accommodations;
- micro-credentials and online learning packages in priority thematic areas.

Modalities successfully used in Indonesia, Vietnam, and Timor-Leste (summarised in [Annex A](#)) provide adaptable models for Cambodia.

4. Strengthen the alumni ecosystem and position alumni as long-term partners in development and diplomacy.

The next phase should adopt a more deliberate and structured strategy for alumni engagement, including older cohorts, AAF/ACIAR alumni, and self-funded graduates. A refreshed Australian Alumni Engagement Strategy should:

- Define objectives and outcomes, for both diplomacy and development purposes, that contribute to bilateral and regional strategies (foreign policy, economic and development);
- Identify target cohorts based on sectoral relevance and influence potential;
- Prioritise alumni engagement activities that yield the greatest development and diplomatic impact;
- Clarify implementation arrangements, including partnerships with private sector actors and strengthened support for the AAA-C.
- Establish robust long-term alumni tracking systems (drawing on Indonesia and Timor-Leste models—see [Annex A](#)), such as biennial updates and periodic ADIS-style surveys;
- Consider creating thematic sectors or Communities of Practice to facilitate professional networking and collaboration, building on successful models such as Aus4Skills in Vietnam.
- Include more structured approaches to foster alumni-led collaboration between Cambodian and Australian organisations. For example, through small partnership seed grants (AUD 5–15k) for alumni–Australian university research collaborations.

Lessons on how alumni associations operate in other countries are detailed in [Annex C](#).

5. Explore co-funding and cost-sharing with the Royal Government of Cambodia.

In line with the *Invested: Australia's Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040*, initiate dialogue with the RGC to establish co-investment and cost-sharing arrangements. Co-funding can demonstrate mutual commitment and create pathways for eventual financial sustainability, while cost-sharing arrangements can broaden institutional engagement without compromising merit or equity. Models such as Indonesia's Endowment Fund for Educational Agency (LPDP)–Australia Awards collaborations offer useful precedents.

Further discussion on design considerations for the next phase of the program can be found in [Annex D](#).

Annex A: Lessons Learned from other Australia Awards Countries in Southeast Asia

Experience from Australia Awards programs in Vietnam, Laos, Indonesia, Timor-Leste, and the Philippines highlights the potential for scholarships to contribute not only to individual achievement but also to broader system strengthening, public diplomacy, and policy influence.

This annex illustrates how across these contexts, Australia has increasingly moved from a standalone scholarship-delivery model toward a **blended ecosystem approach** that intentionally connects long- and short-term awards, professional development, institutional partnerships, and structured alumni engagement.

1. Linking Scholarships to Institutional Strengthening

Vietnam's Aus4Skills program demonstrates the value of pairing individual scholarships with institutional partnerships. Alumni are embedded within structured reform efforts involving ministries, universities, and provincial authorities. Mechanisms such as policy roundtables, joint research collaborations, and sector-specific alumni platforms ensure that graduates can apply their skills within organisational and policy systems—rather than relying solely on individual reintegration strategies.

Implication for Cambodia:

Partnering with targeted ministries and universities to co-design reintegration pathways, the provision leadership training opportunities would enhance the translation of alumni capabilities into institutional reform initiatives.

2. Mixed Targeting Models to Balance Equity and Strategic Influence

The Philippines operates two complementary scholarship categories:

- a **targeted stream** for priority ministries and sectors where institutional capacity-building is needed, and
- an **open stream** that preserves broad access and merit-based competition.

This approach maintains equity while enabling targeted investment in agencies central to reform.

Implication for Cambodia:

A model combining open and targeted awards—can balance inclusiveness with stronger alignment to sectoral priorities and institutional influence.

3. Diversified Learning Modalities to Widen Access and Increase Influence

Indonesia has expanded beyond long-term awards to include: split-site Masters, joint scholarships with government (e.g., LPDP in Indonesia), short courses, micro-credentials, and online learning pathways.

Regional programs use short courses not only for equity but for strategic diplomacy. Thematic cohorts from climate ministries, digital regulators, education reform bodies, and provincial administrations build sectoral coalitions, facilitate structured exchange with Australia, and generate rapid policy impact.

Australia Awards Fellowships also serve as short, targeted engagements for technical or policy dialogue and for strengthening organisational level partnerships between Cambodia and Australia.

These modalities broaden access, particularly for women, provincial staff, and people with disabilities who cannot leave work for extended periods. They also enable the Embassy to shape strategic themes, convene mid-career influencers, and align training with bilateral priorities.

Implication for Cambodia:

Short courses and fellowships could be used more deliberately to support inclusivity, convene mid-career leaders, support priority ministries build a critical mass, and build organisational linkages aligned to the Cambodia–Australia partnership.

4. Systematic Tracking of Alumni Careers and Influence

Indonesia and Timor-Leste employ a structured monitoring system that includes: routine tracking of alumni roles and employers, biennial alumni update surveys, and triennial Alumni Development Impact Surveys (ADIS) for all cohorts.

This data is synthesised into an assessment of “influence level” (e.g., technical, managerial, strategic), which is shared with DFAT Post to inform programming, sector engagement, and alumni mobilisation.

Implication for Cambodia:

Introducing periodic alumni update surveys and a Cambodia-wide ADIS would enable DFAT Post to identify high-influence alumni, allocate resources strategically, and understand where alumni are contributing to policy and system change.

5. More Inclusive Pathways for People with Disabilities

Timor-Leste offers several structural innovations for disability inclusion. These include reduced IELTS thresholds for people with disability (5.0 for Diploma/Associate Diploma; 5.5 for Bachelor) to study at the undergraduate level, dedicated short courses and preparatory ELT in Australia, and funded accessibility accommodations.

These approaches recognise that rigid application of entry requirements disproportionately excludes people with disability due to systemic barriers, not capacity deficits. Notably, the disability-focused ELT short course enabled an applicant who would not otherwise have qualified to successfully obtain a scholarship.

In Laos, the revival of the LANS Scholarship similarly places explicit attention on dismantling structural barriers for people with disabilities.

Implication for Cambodia:

AAC could deepen disability inclusion by expanding ELT pathways, providing in-country accessible IELTS options, and embedding accessibility measures across the award lifecycle—not relying on exceptional individual workarounds.

6. Outreach Targeting Rural, Indigenous, and Underrepresented Groups

In Timor-Leste, AAS program address systemic inequities by engaging earlier in the pipeline including through: school visits in rural and remote areas; partnerships with OPDs and Indigenous community organisations; sessions with development partners; local language radio messaging, and billboards along major transit routes.

These initiatives create a longer-term pipeline of candidates who might otherwise never reach scholarship application stage.

Implication for Cambodia:

AAC could collaborate with the MoEYS Special Education Department, the Ministry of Rural Development, provincial universities, and OPDs to identify and prepare potential candidates earlier in their academic journeys.

7. Alumni Platforms as Policy Dialogue Mechanisms

Programs in Indonesia, Vietnam, and Philippines increasingly use alumni platforms for cross-sector policy engagement. Alumni are mobilised as: advisors, policy peers, guest speakers for ministerial delegations, connectors to Australian institutions, and leaders of thematic communities of practice.

These platforms amplify Australia’s diplomatic footprint, contribute to and reinforce ongoing relationships beyond alumni and Australia.

Implication for Cambodia:

Strengthening Embassy (and visiting delegation) linkages with alumni would facilitate knowledge exchange, locally led input to policy dialogue and enhance visibility of Australian technical leadership.

8. Key Lessons for Cambodia

Regional experience demonstrates that the most effective Australia Awards programs operate not as standalone scholarship schemes but as integrated ecosystems that connect human capital development, institutional partnerships, and alumni influence. For Cambodia, the evidence suggests value in adopting a hybrid model that brings together the following elements:

a) Institutional Partnerships:

Co-designed reintegration pathways, organisational strengthening initiatives, and sectoral collaboration with ministries, universities, OPDs, civil society and provincial authorities ensure that alumni skills are embedded where they are most needed and that knowledge utilisation is systematically supported.

b) Twin-Track Targeting Approaches:

A combination of open and targeted awards helps balance inclusion with strategic influence. This avoids privileging elite ministries, maintains equitable access, and enables the program to build critical mass in priority sectors without closing opportunities for emerging or marginalised applicants.

c) Multiple Learning Pathways:

Long-term scholarships, short courses, thematic fellowships, micro-credentials, and online programs—widely used in Indonesia, Vietnam, Timor-Leste and the Pacific—expand access, including for mid-career leaders, women, people with disabilities, and provincial staff. These modalities also allow the program to engage more closely with organisations critical to Australia–Cambodia priorities.

d) Systematic Alumni Tracking:

Regular alumni update surveys, periodic Alumni Development Impact Surveys (ADIS), and influence mapping provide credible evidence of outcomes and impact. These systems guide investment decisions, support policy dialogue, and help identify high-impact alumni for targeted engagement.

e) Upstream Pipeline Development:

Expanded outreach and preparatory pathways—through provincial universities, OPDs, Indigenous associations, and targeted feeder initiatives—help widen the pipeline of eligible candidates. Early intervention is especially important for women, provincial candidates, people with disabilities, and Indigenous Cambodians who face entrenched structural barriers.

f) Alumni Platforms as Diplomatic Assets:

Strong, locally led alumni associations and thematic communities of practice serve as durable platforms for policy exchange, professional networking, and public diplomacy. Strengthening AAA-C and cultivating sector-based alumni groups can amplify Australia's visibility, credibility, and influence in Cambodia.

g) Benefits of Engaging Self-Funded Alumni:

Regional practice also highlights the significant value of engaging self-funded alumni, who often occupy influential roles in business, finance, digital industries, academia, and civil society. Their inclusion broadens Australia's professional footprint, strengthens engagement, and expands people-to-people and institutional linkages with Australia. When managed carefully (e.g., through AAA-C platforms and selective Embassy engagement), this cohort can enhance public diplomacy, diversify networks available to AAS alumni, and reinforce the reputation of Australian education—without diluting AAC's core development and GEDSI mandate.

Across the region, lessons learned from other Australia Awards programs demonstrate that **scholarships alone are insufficient to generate system-level influence**. The greatest impact occurs when long-term awards are complemented by diversified learning modalities, structured alumni networks and engagement, institutional partnerships, and data-driven MEL systems. For Cambodia, adopting components of this blended model would improve inclusion, strengthen strategic alignment and public diplomacy, and amplify Australia's contribution to human capital development and policy reform.

Annex B: AAS Targeting Approaches

Australia Awards Cambodia (AAC) can draw on three models used across the region for AAS promotion and candidate selection —**open**, **soft-targeting**, and **targeted**—each offering distinct advantages and trade-offs.

This annex illustrates how experience from Indonesia, Vietnam, Timor-Leste, Laos, and the Philippines demonstrates that no single model is universally optimal and that programs achieve the strongest outcomes when targeting evolves in stages and blends approaches according to context, program maturity, and partnership readiness.

1. Open approach

AAC currently uses an **open** approach, in which applicants from any sector may apply for any postgraduate field of study (excluding general management degrees). Selection is based on academic merit, leadership potential, inclusivity considerations, and development commitment. This approach maximises accessibility, supports a diverse talent pool, and strengthens Australia’s public diplomacy reach.

Recent intakes show that while traditional disciplines (public policy, public health, education) continue to dominate applications, candidates are increasingly applying for awards in emerging fields such as climate science, artificial intelligence, maritime studies, data science, fintech, actuarial studies, rehabilitation, and cybersecurity—reflecting Cambodia’s evolving development priorities and Embassy guidance.

Strengths:

- Most flexible and inclusive model.
- Supports emerging leaders and early-career professionals.
- Maximises public diplomacy and visibility.

Limitations:

- Diffuses impact across sectors, limiting critical mass in priority areas.
- Offers limited alignment with sector or organisational reforms.

2. Soft-Targeting

A **soft-targeting** approach maintains open competition but signals priority thematic areas. These fields of study would be identified through analysis of the Cambodia Development Plan, DFAT’s Development Partnership Plan (DPP), INVEST’s priority sectors, and ongoing consultation with RGC ministries, OPDs, universities, and DFAT implementing partners.

For Cambodia, soft targeting could highlight priority areas such as climate and environment, digital governance, STEM fields, and disability inclusion. Crucially, soft targeting does **not** prescribe which Cambodian organisation applicants must work for; instead, it guides applications and selection toward collectively agreed development priorities while preserving open access.

Strengths:

- Strengthens strategic alignment while maintaining equity.
- Allows gradual shift in the applicant profile without excluding other capable candidates.
- Supports locally led development as ministries articulate sectoral needs rather than predefined quotas.

Limitations:

- Influence on organisational capability is indirect until reinforced through partnerships.
- Requires clear communication to avoid misinterpretation as organisational targeting.

3. Targeted Awards

A **targeted** model focuses eligibility to specific organisations, sectors, or professional cohorts to address clearly defined capacity gaps. Targeted awards work best where institutional reforms are underway and where ministries or other partners can co-design promotion pipelines, reintegration and career/leadership pathways, workplace placements.

Examples across the region (Vietnam, Laos, Indonesia) show that targeted awards can create critical mass in priority sectors and strengthen institutional change when integrated with other organisational strengthening initiatives (such as short courses, AAF and policy fellowships) and/or supported by other DFAT investments.

Targeted awards can also be used for inclusivity objectives (e.g., reserving awards for people with disability or Indigenous candidates). This approach is used in Timor-Leste, where (facilitated by pre-award ELT), at least one of the AAS awards is annually designated for people with disability to study in Australia at the undergraduate level.

Strengths:

- Drives institutional impact and policy influence.
- Supports targeted leadership pipelines within ministries or provincial authorities.
- Enables deeper locally led partnerships and co-creation.

Limitations / Risks:

- Can reinforce existing inequalities if dominated by elite ministries.
- Requires strong RGC buy-in and readiness.
- Reduces flexibility if not balanced with open or soft-targeted approaches.

4. Proposed Approach for Cambodia: A Phased Twin-Track Model

Given Cambodia's relatively small number of annual awards, the current readiness for more structured scholarship partnership with Cambodian organisations, and lessons learned from other AAS programs, the evaluation recommends a **phased transition** from the current open approach toward a **twin-track open and targeted model** (as used for example in the Philippines). The approach is grounded in regional evidence, tailored to Cambodia's context, and responsive to the Embassy's priorities for influence, visibility, and system strengthening.

4.1. Open Approach (majority of awards)

The evaluation recommends initially **retaining a predominantly open targeting approach**, as this provides the widest flexibility and ensures equitable access across sectors and populations. **An open approach can still incorporate light-touch guidance on preferred fields of study linked to Cambodia's priority skills gaps**, ensuring alignment with DFAT and RGC priorities **without restricting eligibility**. Under this stream, applicants continue to compete on merit, inclusion principles remain central, and the program maintains responsiveness to evolving Cambodian priorities.

This model enables AAC to identify emerging talent across diverse sectors, preserve fairness for provincial and marginalised applicants, and uphold the locally led development principle that opportunities should not be restricted by institutional affiliation.

5. Targeted Awards (minority of awards, introduced gradually)

Once partnership arrangements are formalised, targeted awards can be introduced with selected organisations—e.g., MoEYS, MoE, MoWA, Ministry of Rural Development, OPDs, provincial authorities, universities, etc. This targeted stream would be used sparingly and only where institutions demonstrate clear commitment to co-identifying candidates, supporting subject relevance during the study period, and co-designing reintegration pathways to ensure alumni skills are effectively utilised.

Rationale for the Phased Twin-Track Approach

This phased approach allows AAC and the Embassy to:

- Ensure the open stream retains primacy, with guidance on priority fields integrated in a non-prescriptive way.
- Avoid disadvantaging candidates from ministries or stakeholders already participating successfully in the current open system.
- Build deeper and more meaningful relationships with priority ministries before assigning any targeted places. Strengthen reintegration outcomes through clearer workforce pathways in targeted organisations
- Enhance institutional influence while retaining space for emerging sectors and future priorities providing strategic flexibility as Cambodia’s development priorities and DFAT’s regional focus evolve.

Overall, this phased ‘twin-track’ model balances inclusiveness, flexibility, and strategic alignment with DFAT’s DPP —ensuring that Cambodia benefits from a broad and diverse applicant pool while allowing deeper institutional partnerships to be strategically developed over time.

Practical Future Implementation Considerations

- Establish a joint **Targeting Advisory Group** with RGC ministries, OPDs, universities, and DFAT programs.
- Annually review and update knowledge/skill gaps to guide award offers based on sector demand, alumni influence data, and bilateral priorities.

Annex C: How Australia Awards Alumni Associations Operate in Other Countries

Lessons for Strengthening the Australia Awards Alumni Association of Cambodia (AAA-C)

Australia Awards alumni associations across Southeast Asia vary in structure, mandate, activity levels and extent of Embassy/Managing Contractor financial and operational support. The more evolved associations share common features: alumni-led governance and activity planning, strong linkages with the Embassy for public diplomacy, strategic alignment with DFAT priorities, and a role in promoting Australia–partner country cooperation.

This annex outlines how the alumni associations operate in Vietnam, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Timor-Leste, highlighting governance and operational features that could inform the future direction of AAA-C.

1. Vietnam – A Strong, Structured Platform with Sector Networks

The **Vietnam's Graduates from Australia Club (VGAC)**, has nearly 7,000 members across five chapters in Hanoi, Hue, Danang, Ho Chi Minh City and Can Tho. Its effectiveness stems from:

Governance and Structure

- Operates independently as a registered association with a national executive committee and provincial chapters.
- Supported by Aus4Skills through a small but consistent annual grant for operations, MEL, and activity coordination.
- Has sectoral sub-networks (e.g., governance, agriculture, education, entrepreneurs) that engage directly with Vietnam ministries and DFAT.

Membership and Inclusion

- Open to all alumni of Australian government-funded and privately funded programs.
- Uses a central database managed in partnership with Aus4Skills.

Role and Activities

- Leads annual policy dialogues and knowledge-sharing events aligned with Australia–Vietnam strategic priorities.
- Facilitates alumni-led partnerships between Vietnamese organisations and Australian universities.
- Coordinates an Alumni of Influence Awards to recognise contributions to public service, STEM, and women's leadership.

Relevance for Cambodia

- Demonstrates the value of **sector-based Communities of Practice**, structured policy engagement, and a **clear governance model** with stable resourcing.
- Offers a model for AAA-C to adopt sub-networks around key themes (e.g., climate, digital economy, inclusive governance).

2. Indonesia – Large, Professionalised Networks with Strong DFAT Integration

Indonesia hosts one of the largest Australia Awards alumni networks globally (15,000+ alumni). The association, **IKAMA (Ikatan Alumni Australia Awards Indonesia)**, operates within a broader ecosystem of alumni platforms.

Governance and Structure

- Large national executive body with provincial chapters in all major regions.
- Supported by the Australia Awards Indonesia (AAI) program, which provides coordination staff, funding, MEL support, and communications.

Membership Profile

- Includes long-term awardees, short-course participants, Australia Awards Fellowships alumni, ACIAR alumni, and self-funded graduates.
- Encourages sub-groups such as women's leadership networks, disability inclusion advocates, and sectoral technical communities.

Activities and Engagement

- Co-delivers DFAT-prioritised technical roundtables (e.g., climate, digital transformation, maritime security).
- Runs mentorship programs, professional development courses, and innovation showcases.
- Conducts biennial alumni surveys and contributes to AAI's influence-mapping.

Relevance for Cambodia

- Shows how integrating alumni into economic diplomacy, policy dialogues, and digital engagement can broaden influence.
- AAI's model demonstrates the importance of a coordinated alumni MEL system to support strategic deployment.

3. Philippines – Dual Scholarship Streams and a Broad Alumni Network

The Philippines alumni are organised under the Australian Alumni Association of the Philippines (AAAP).

Governance and Structure

- A legally registered non-profit association with a national board and regional chapters.
- Independent, but receives periodic DFAT support for major events and policy dialogues.

Membership Profile

- Open to all Australian university graduates (government-funded and private).
- Membership fees provide partial resourcing; DFAT provides strategic grants for priority engagement.

Role and Activities

- Strong focus on professional development, networking, women-in-leadership programs, and connections between Filipino and Australian businesses.
- Regular involvement in DFAT projects on governance, education, and disability inclusion.

Relevance for Cambodia

- Demonstrates how associations can operate semi-independently with mixed funding sources.

- Illustrates the value of business and private sector engagement, a gap for AAA-C that Cambodia could strengthen.

4. Timor-Leste – Smaller Network, Highly Development-Focused

The Timor-Leste Australia Alumni Association (TL3A) is a close-knit community of nearly 400 alumni members. With the support of the Australia Awards Timor-Leste AATL Secretariat, the TL3A manages a range of professional development and social activities.

Governance and Structure

- The TL3A Board consists of a President, Vice President and three members who serve a two-year term.
- The TL3A Board is supported by the TL3A Alumni Secretariat Coordinator (who is employed full-time by the AATL Managing Contractor), who provides high-level secretariat support to the Board, coordinates alumni events and alumni sectoral groups. The vast majority of TL3A activities are funded through AATL.

Membership Profile

- The TL3A is open to all DFAT funded and self-funded scholars but in practice engagement is almost exclusively with AAS alumni.

Role and Activities

- The TL3A implement an annual plan of activities (with the majority implemented and funded by AATL support).
- The sectoral group activities demonstrate a strong commitment (and 'giving back') to community development including with respect to gender equality, disability inclusion and youth leadership, and public sector reform.
- Through the TL3A, alumni support AATL activities (such as scholarships promotion and participation in reintegration workshops), DFAT public diplomacy activities (such as Alumni Welcome Home events) and regularly engage in policy discussions with the DFAT Post on rural development, education reform, and social services.

Relevance for Cambodia

- Offers a strong model for **equity-driven alumni engagement**, particularly in relation to people with disability and rural/remote communities.
- Illustrates the need for ongoing financial/operational support by DFAT/Managing Contractor in countries with smaller number of alumni (particularly where the alumni have high levels of work and community/leadership obligations).

Cross-Cutting Lessons for Strengthening AAA-C

- Drawing across these examples, five design insights emerge for the Australia Awards Alumni Association of Cambodia:

1. Establish Clear Governance and Resourcing

- Most effective associations have formal constitutions, elected boards, and annual workplans.
- External support is **small, predictable, and primarily catalytic**—IKAMA, VGAC, and AAAP all rely on this model.

- AAA-C could benefit from a refreshed Alumni Strategy, governance review and clearer division of roles between DFAT, AAC, and the association.

2. Engage Broad Membership While Protecting Australia Awards Integrity

- All strong associations allow privately funded alumni to join—*without diluting* the purpose of Australia Awards.
- Cambodia should maintain open membership, but ring-fence AAC ODA funds for AAS alumni (and other Australian government funded e.g. AAF/ACIAR/UMAP, short courses etc).

3. Adopt Sector-Based Communities of Practice

- Vietnam, Indonesia, and Timor-Leste programs show that **thematic alumni networks** are the most effective platforms for influence.
- AAA-C could pilot CoPs in:
 - health reform
 - education reform
 - water and agriculture
 - climate policy
 - digital economy
 - disability inclusion

4. Position Alumni as Partners in Policy and Diplomacy

- Successful associations serve as “knowledge bridges” supporting ministerial/other official delegation visits, advising on sector reforms, and contributing to Australia’s economic and public diplomacy.
- AAA-C could provide alumni profiles for Embassy briefings, delegate visits, and policy roundtables.

5. Strengthen MEL and Alumni Tracking

- Indonesia and Timor-Leste demonstrate more mature systems of tracking alumni outcomes, informing DFAT strategy.
- AAA-C can contribute to MEL by maintaining alumni directories, updating influence maps, and sharing insights on cohort achievements.

Alumni associations across the region illustrate that effective alumni engagement requires a mix of independent alumni leadership, light but reliable DFAT support, thematic networks, and strategic use of alumni as partners in policy, diplomacy, and development. These lessons provide a roadmap for revitalising the AAA-C into a vibrant, inclusive, and influential platform that enhances the long-term impact of Australia Awards in Cambodia.

Annex D: Design Considerations for the Future Phase of Australia Awards Cambodia

This annex outlines key design considerations and actionable options for a future phase of AAC. These expand on evaluation findings, lessons from other Australia Awards programs, DFAT priorities (Invested, DPP, etc), and emerging opportunities for deeper system influence and locally led development (LLD).

1. Embed Locally Led Development Across the Award Cycle

AAC already undertakes periodic consultation, but a more systematic model—aligned with DFAT’s localisation and influence ambitions—would strengthen Cambodian ownership and enhance policy alignment.

Design Consideration:

Embed structured Cambodian stakeholder input across priority-setting, selection, on-award support, and reintegration. Embed locally led development by involving RGC and other Cambodian stakeholders more systematically throughout the scholarship cycle. This would include at the targeting stage; employer involvement in continuing contact with awardees during their study (including informing the relevance of their subject choices); and especially in reintegration. Work consistently with priority organisations to improve institutional outcomes.

Actionable Options:

1.1. Structured sectoral consultations (annual or biennial)

- Establish an annual “Priority-Setting Roundtable” with MoEYS, MoE, MoWA, MLVT, provincial departments, OPDs, universities, private sector representatives, Chamver of Commerce, DFAT investments (CAPRED, ACCESS, Ponlok Chomnes).
- Use the roundtable to review (postgraduate) skills shortages, pipeline gaps, and priority themes for the next intake. For specialist fields where only a small number of experts are needed (including PhD-level specialisations), consider candidates already studying overseas (funded by DFAT, RGC, or other development partners) and assess whether targeted short courses may better serve immediate or highly specialist needs.
- Document agreed priorities in an annual “Cambodia Scholarship Priorities Note” endorsed jointly by DFAT and CDC/ministry partners, and ensure these priorities are reflected in AAC’s promotional and outreach activities.

1.2. Co-designed nomination pathways

- Introduce partnership agreements (MOUs or Letters of Collaboration) with 3-5 priority organisations that outline mutually agreed roles: candidate identification, nomination, ELT support, reintegration planning.
- Require partners to maintain structured contact with awardees during their study period, including providing input on subject relevance, practical application, and emerging workplace needs.
- Pilot “Ministry Partner Pipelines” in climate, TVET, digital economy, disaster risk management, inclusive education, or public service reform.

1.3. Joint reintegration planning

- Formalise RGC involvement by co-developing reintegration plans with employers prior to departure, revisited mid-study, and implemented on return.
- Provide small reintegration grants to ministries or employers to implement these plans (e.g., research projects, policy pilots, workplace innovation).
- Support ministries to develop their own human capital strategies incorporating returning alumni.

1.4. Alumni-led policy platforms

- Establish alumni-led thematic working groups (e.g., climate governance, digital regulation, disability inclusion) with joint ownership by ministries and AAA-C.
- Co-design at least one annual policy dialogue per theme, using alumni as technical convenors.

2. Consolidate Sectoral and Thematic Focus for Systemic Impact

AAC's broad eligibility has supported inclusion, but the impact has been diffuse. A future phase can strengthen alignment with bilateral and regional objectives by consolidating focus areas.

Design Consideration:

Prioritise thematic areas that reflect mutual strategic priorities (climate, digital economy, STEM, TVET, inclusive education).

Actionable Options:

2.1. Develop a “Cambodia Thematic Scholarship Framework”

- Identify 5–6 priority themes aligned with:
 - Cambodia's Pentagonal Strategy
 - DFAT DPP and Southeast Asia Strategy
 - DFAT sector investments (CAPRED, Ponlok Chomnes, ACCESS, ACIAR)
- Publish these themes as part of the annual call for applications, retaining a final “open field” option.

2.2. Build critical mass within targeted sectors

- Set soft numerical targets (not quotas) for fields of study—e.g., 5–10% of awards consistently allocated to climate and digital economy.
- Encourage cluster applications from priority ministries to grow sectoral cohorts.

2.3. Integrate AAC with DFAT sectoral investments

- Require each DFAT implementing partner to nominate 1–2 priority areas where alumni are most needed and provide criteria for scholar selection.
- Pair alumni research with CAPRED policy pilots (e.g., climate risk modelling, water governance, renewable energy).

3. Introduce Fit-for-Purpose and Cost-Effective Modalities

Future modalities should widen access, reach mid-career leaders, and offer diverse pathways that address Cambodia's pipeline constraints.

Design Consideration:

Introduce flexible pathways: in-country scholarships, split-site Masters, blended learning, targeted short courses, and specialised ELT.

Actionable Options:

3.1. In-country scholarships for people with disability and Indigenous applicants

- Partner with Cambodian universities to co-deliver accredited graduate certificates or Master’s pathways with Australian universities providing supervision or dual-credit.
- Ensure accessible and inclusive learning environments by funding accessible materials, assistive technologies, and academic support.
- Consider offering AAS undergraduate awards for high-potential Indigenous and people with disability candidates already in the workforce, where postgraduate eligibility barriers (e.g., English level or prior study gaps) remain prohibitive.

3.2. Targeted short courses with dual functions

- **Equity short courses:** Women, provincial candidates, Indigenous people, early-career people with disability.
- **Influence short courses:** Mid-career leaders from MoEYS, MoE, Ministry of Economy & Finance, digital regulators, climate ministries.

3.3. Flexible ELT and readiness pipelines

- Introduce pre-application ELT for promising candidates flagged by ministries, OPDs, and provincial universities.
- Fund up to two IELTS attempts per equity candidate, especially for people with disability. However, before committing to a full accredited test, encourage candidates to use free or low-cost screening tools (e.g., British Council IELTS mock tests) to gauge readiness and reduce financial barriers.
- Work with Australian universities to access existing preparatory modules (e.g., academic writing, research design, critical reading), which can be delivered online or in blended mode.

3.4. Sector-based fellowships

- Use Australia Awards Fellowships (AAF) as the primary modality to support targeted cohorts of Cambodian professionals.
- Seek AAGSM advice on Australian organisations—including universities, government agencies, and research institutes—that can host Cambodian fellows (either as a dedicated cohort or integrated with other countries).
- Prioritise fellowships in areas such as:
 - climate governance
 - digital regulation
 - inclusive education reform
 - water and land-use planning

4. Strengthen the Alumni Ecosystem as a Strategic Asset

A future phase should position alumni as long-term partners in bilateral cooperation, public diplomacy, sectoral reform, and regional engagement.

Design Consideration:

Modernise, resource, and expand the alumni engagement model, including AAA-C, diverse alumni cohorts, and improved MEL systems.

Actionable Options:

4.1. Update the Alumni Engagement Strategy

Include:

- clear objectives linked to Embassy priorities (economic diplomacy, climate diplomacy, governance, people-to-people ties)
- priority cohorts (AAS, AAF, ACIAR, privately funded alumni)
- annual sectoral engagement plans
- roles of AAC, Post, AAA-C, and Australian institutions
- implementation budget and resourcing allocations
- a performance framework with indicators for influence, collaboration, and contribution

4.2. Create sectoral Communities of Practice (CoPs)

- Climate | digital economy | STEM | health security | inclusive education | water governance
- Each CoP co-chaired by an alumni leader and a partner ministry official.
- Working with Phonlok Chomnes to provide small grants (AUD 3–10k) for alumni-led research translation, workshops, and joint Australia–Cambodia dialogues.

4.3. Strengthen AAA-C governance and outreach

- Fund AAA-C back-office support, membership management, and activity implementation.
- Support AAA-C to recruit diverse members—including privately funded alumni—while maintaining Australia Awards distinction through branding and budget protection.

4.4. Conduct additional alumni MEL

- Biennial Alumni Update Survey
- Triennial Cambodia ADIS
- Influence mapping (e.g., public leadership roles, technical contributions, policymaking engagement)
- Alumni outcome/impact tracking through ministry partnerships

5. Explore Co-Funding and Cost-Sharing Models

To enhance sustainability and signal mutual commitment, a future phase should explore structured co-funding and cost-sharing arrangements with the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) and potentially the private sector.

Design Consideration:

Enhance sustainability and ownership through phased co-funding and cost-sharing, aligned with the Invested framework.

Actionable Options:

5.1. Co-funding for long-term awards

- Invite selected ministries (MoEYS, MEF, MoE, MLVT) to contribute co-funding for technical Master’s degrees, linked to the partnership MoUs developed for targeted awards.
- Offer recognition (e.g., “Australian–Cambodian Co-Funded Scholars”) to incentivise participation.

5.2. Cost-sharing for short courses

- Co-share costs with ministries for influence-driven and sector-specific short courses.
- Partner with development partners (UNDP, GIZ, JICA) to co-fund cross-donor leadership and technical programs.

5.3. Co-investment in ELT and readiness pathways

- Encourage RGC and provincial universities to co-finance English preparation programs.
- Seek private sector contributions for scholarships in high-demand fields such as fintech, renewable energy, and supply chain logistics.

5.4. Introduce a “Public–Private Scholarship Pilot”

- Establish a structured public–private cooperation mechanism that enables companies to contribute to human capital development through co-funding or co-design of short courses, internships, mentoring, and applied research.
- Draw on alumni networks, private companies, and industry associations to create opportunities for collaboration with DFAT programs and visiting business delegations (consistent with INVEST).
- Focus engagement in sectors where Australia and Cambodia share economic priorities—digital skills, climate tech, agribusiness, and advanced manufacturing.
- These partnerships can complement long-term awards by supporting practical experience, workplace linkages, and employer-driven skill utilisation.

The future phase of Australia Awards Cambodia can evolve from a scholarship delivery mechanism into a **strategic, locally led, multi-modality human capital and diplomacy platform**. The actionable design options summarised here provide DFAT with flexible choices ranging from targeted adjustments to more ambitious expansion pathways. Together, they offer a roadmap for a modernised AAC that delivers equitable access, deeper institutional impact, stronger Cambodia–Australia partnerships, and enduring regional influence.

Annex E: Key Evaluation Questions

1. To what extent is the Australian Awards program strategically aligned with and relevant to Cambodia's national development priorities and DFAT's objectives?

Theme: Strategic Alignment & Targeting

Sub-questions:

- 1.1. How effectively does the AAC align with priority development areas, particularly in emerging sectors such as GEDSI and climate change?
- 1.2. To what extent does the current targeting strategy (including PhD focus) reflect AAC's strategic objectives and Cambodia's national priorities? To what extent is AAC consistent with the global Australia Awards framework and policies?
- 1.3. How well does AAC complement and integrate with other DFAT investments and priorities? To what extent has the AAC targeted particular sectoral groups (e.g. RGC and public / private / NGO sector), and what has been the implication? Is the AAC attracting applicants aligned with strategic sectors and equity goals? How is this assessed?

Theme: Equity & Access

Sub-questions:

- 1.4. What are key barriers to participation and award outcomes including reintegration, relevant employment, and influence) for marginalised groups (e.g. provincial and Indigenous populations, LGBTIQ+, people with disabilities), and how have these evolved since the Mid-Term Review (MTR)?
- 1.5. How effective are the current strategies (e.g. EPP) and other support mechanisms in addressing these barriers?
- 1.6. What opportunities exist to increase the equity of the program and strengthen the pipeline of candidates from priority groups?
- 1.7. To what extent and in what ways can the next phase of AAC better respond to Cambodia's future human resource priorities, including opportunities for support in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and national bachelor degrees?

2. To what extent has AAC achieved its outcomes?

Theme: RGC Engagement & Selection

Sub-questions:

- 2.1. How effective are current strategies in increasing RGC candidate numbers? (Note link to KEQ 1 and targeting)
- 2.2. What factors contribute to the declining numbers of RGC candidates, how have these changed since the MTR, and what adaptations have been made or are required?

Theme: Program Delivery

- 2.3. How effectively is the program being implemented to meet the intermediate and end-of-program outcomes?
- 2.4. How effectively are OAE and alumni activities supporting scholars' professional development and links with Australia?
- 2.5. What are the opportunities and challenges in including privately funded ('self-funded') scholars in AAC activities, and how have these been approached to date? (Note link to KEQ 1 and targeting)
- 2.6. What recurring operational challenges impact program delivery, and how can these be addressed?

Theme: Monitoring & Learning

- 2.7. How well does the current MEL system capture and use data in ways that improve the AAC overall?
- 2.8. To what extent have M&E findings been integrated into AAC adaptations?
- 2.9. To what extent does M&E capture and inform alumni engagement activities and contribute to a robust, interactive and expanded alumni database?

Theme: Public Diplomacy & Influence

Sub-questions:

- 2.10. How effectively does AAC support and contribute to Post's public diplomacy objectives?
- 2.11. To what extent are alumni emerging as influential leaders in their respective sectors?
- 2.12. What opportunities exist to strengthen the AAC's contribution to Australia's broader diplomatic objectives?

3. How sustainable are the investment's outcomes and what is the quality of ongoing engagement with alumni?

Theme: Alumni Engagement & Sustainability

Sub-questions:

- 3.1. How effective is the current balance between generating new alumni and maintaining quality engagement with existing alumni? To what extent do alumni continue to engage with the program?
- 3.2. To what extent are alumni engagement activities aligned with participants' professional aspirations and development and links with Australia?
- 3.3. Is membership of the AAAC open to all graduates, not just AAC? How effective has the AAAC been and what measures are relevant to consider in future?
- 3.4. How effectively do Alumni Research Grants complement other DFAT programs and priorities?

Annex F: Evaluation Methodology

Overview

The AAC End-of-Program Evaluation applied a participatory, mixed-methods, and context-sensitive approach, consistent with DFAT's Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Standards. As elaborated in the Evaluation Plan, the methodology was designed to ensure inclusive stakeholder engagement, rigorous data triangulation, and practical insights for future programming.

The evaluation followed a dual-path approach:

- Pathway 1: Desktop review of program documentation, MEL data, and contextual literature.
- Pathway 2: Stakeholder consultations through interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and workshops.

These pathways were interlinked, with insights from document analysis informing stakeholder engagement, and vice versa. This iterative process enabled continuous refinement of findings and recommendations.

Evaluation team

The four-person independent evaluation team has significant individual and combined knowledge and experience in evaluating Australia Awards programs throughout the Indo-Pacific. To provide local context and understanding, one of the team members was a Cambodian (herself an AAS alumni). This team was able to together develop evaluative assessments of the available evidence.

Evaluation Audience

The primary audience for this EPR is DFAT Phnom Penh Post, particularly the Executive and Development Cooperation teams. Secondary audiences include:

- Royal Government of Cambodia ministries (e.g. CDC, MoEYS, MoWA)
- DFAT Canberra (Global Education and Scholarships, Disability and Social Inclusion, Office of Southeast Asia)
- Tetra Tech, the current Managing Contractor
- Australian Alumni Association of Cambodia (AAA-C)
- Cambodian alumni and scholars, especially from equity cohorts

Desktop review

The evaluation team reviewed a wide range of documents, including:

- AAC Investment Design Document (IDD), Annual Progress Reports, and Work Plans
- DFAT strategic guidance (e.g. GEDSI, localisation, public diplomacy)
- MEL frameworks, alumni feedback, and Global Tracer Facility (GTF) reports
- Cambodia's national development strategies (e.g. Pentagonal Strategy, Education Strategic Plan)
- DFAT performance assessments and internal memos

This Evaluation provides a strong evidence base for assessing strategic alignment, program effectiveness, and equity outcomes. (See list of key documents is in [Annex H.](#))

Consultations

Between August and September 2025, the team conducted extensive face to face and online consultations in Australia and Cambodia, including:

- Semi-structured interviews with DFAT staff (Phnom Penh, Canberra, Hanoi, Vientiane, Jakarta), ACIAR, Tetra Tech, Cambodian government ministries, universities, and development partners
- Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with AA scholars, self-funded students, and alumni, disaggregated by gender, disability status, sector, and region
- Individual interviews with selected alumni, including Equity Pathways Program (EPP) participants

In total, over 54 consultations were conducted, with strong representation from women, people with disabilities, and provincial alumni. The consultations explored themes such as scholar experience, reintegration, alumni impact, and program responsiveness.

Interview guides were tailored to stakeholder groups and aligned with the Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs). Ethical protocols were followed throughout, including informed consent and accommodations for accessibility. (See the list of consultations in [Annex D.](#))

Data analysis

Data from documents, interviews, and FGDs were analysed by KEQs and thematic categories. The team engaged in a continuous cycle of reading, analysis, reflection, and synthesis, allowing for iterative learning and validation of emerging insights.

Qualitative data were coded thematically, and quantitative data from MEL systems (e.g. OASIS, ADIS) were used to triangulate findings and assess trends.

Validation and Sense Making Workshop

A Validation and Sensemaking Workshop was held with DFAT Phnom Penh and AAC Managing Contractor staff on 28 August 2025 to test preliminary findings and refine recommendations. An Aide Memoire presentation was presented to support active participation. The workshop included plenary and breakout discussions, followed by a structured feedback process. Stakeholder input was instrumental in shaping the final report and ensuring its relevance and utility.

Limitations

The evaluation faced several limitations:

- Scope and time constraints: The breadth of AAC activities required prioritisation in the evaluation, with emphasis placed on strategic alignment, equity, and alumni impact.
- Security and logistical challenges: Conflict in Cambodia's border regions limited travel to some provinces, requiring flexible consultation formats.
- Data gaps: While AAC MEL systems provided valuable data, some gaps remain in the available evidence for tracking longer-term alumni outcomes and institutional change.
- Limited consultation with current scholars: Due to competing priorities during the exam period and the compressed timeframe for data collection, the evaluation team was not able to consult directly with many current AAS awardees (or self-funded students) studying in Australia.

Annex G: List of Stakeholder Consultations

Australian Embassy - Cambodia

| Stakeholder Category | Contact | Role | M | F | Other |
|----------------------|-------------------|---|---|---|-------|
| DFAT | Bridget Collier | Deputy Head of Mission | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| DFAT | Kirsty Harris | Counsellor, Development Cooperation | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| DFAT | Sandra Martinovic | Second Secretary, Development Cooperation | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| DFAT | Mory Heng | Program Manager, Development Cooperation | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| DFAT | Sothea Hel | Portfolio Leader | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| DFAT | Tegan Park | First Secretary, Development Cooperation | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| DFAT | Leigh Mitchell | Aid Effectiveness Adviser | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| DFAT | Connor Floyd | Immediate past Second Secretary, AAC | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| ACIAR | Ly Sopheary | Program Manager | 0 | 1 | 0 |

RGC

| Stakeholder Category | Contact | Role | M | F | Other |
|----------------------|------------------------|--|---|---|-------|
| RGC-CDC | H.E. Mrs Phana Veunida | Deputy Secretary-General | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| RGC-MoEYS | H.E Mak Ngoy | Director General of Higher Education | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| RGC-DAC | Mr. Hok Ly | Director of Rights of Persons with Disabilities Unit (with 3 Deputy Directors) | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| RGC-MoLVT | H.E. Mrs. Sous Sinoun | Under Secretary of State | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| RGC-MoWA | H.E Nhean Sochetra | Director General of Social Development | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| RGC-MOWA | Ms. Chhorn Ratha | Deputy Director General of Social Development | 0 | 1 | 0 |

AAC

| Stakeholder Category | Contact | Role | M | F | Other |
|----------------------|--------------------|---|---|---|-------|
| AAC | Michael Sadlon | Team Leader, Tetra Tech | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| AAC | Alison White | Contractor Representative | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| AAC | Piseth Pum | Awards Manager | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| AAC | Lina Khoun | Alumni Engagement Manager | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| AAC | Reasmey Cheut | Equity Pathways and Inclusion Coordinator | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| AAC | Khy Lim | Communications and Events Coordinator | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| AAC | Malis Chheang | Monitoring and Evaluation Manager | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| AAC | Leli Setiono | On-Awards Enrichment Adviser | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| AAC | Chanmonyneath Neth | Awards Coordinator | 0 | 1 | 0 |

Development Partners

| Stakeholder Category | Contact | Role | M | F | Other |
|--|-------------------------------------|--|---|---|-------|
| ACCESS | Sophia Cason | Team Leader | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| CAPRED | Paul Keogh | Team Leader | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| IFL-Implementing Partner for Pre-departure English program | Mr. Mab Tith | Director | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| IFL | Mr. Keuk Channarith | Head of Department | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| IFL | Mr. Samleng Phearun | Lecturer of English | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| ACE/IDP implementing partner for EPP | Mr. Ashley Irving | Principal | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Manaaki New Zealand Scholarship | Savorn Chhum | Scholarships Manager, IDP | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Civil Society | Ms. Mak Monika | Executive Director, Cambodian Disabled Peoples Organisation (CDPO) | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Civil Society | H.E Neang Phalla | National Institute for Special Education | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Civil Society | Ms. Sokserey Pol | National Institute for Special Education | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Civil Society | Ms. Mane Yun | Executive director of Cambodia's Indigenous Peoples Organisation (CIPO) | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Civil Society | Mr. Nun Sokunthea | Former President and founder of Cambodia Indigenous Youth Association (CIYA) | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Civil Society | Dr. Eng Netra (and four colleagues) | Director, Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI) | 3 | 2 | 0 |
| Civil Society | Mr Ou Virak | Founder and President, Future Forum | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Civil Society | Ms Sophorn Phean | Country Director, Oxfam | 0 | 1 | 0 |

AAA-C, alumni and EPP students

| Stakeholder Category | Contact | Role | M | F | Other |
|---|---|---|---|---|-------|
| AAA-C Board | Mr. Hong Reaksmeay Ms. Tum Sopheareth Mr. Chhoen Kongkea Ms. Pheng Sovicheany | N/A | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| ETG Advisory Group | Ms. Chinda Min Mr. Meakara Khen Mr. Heav Det Mr. Sochea Pheap Ms. Sokleng Kheang | N/A | 3 | 2 | 0 |
| AAS Alumni | Ms. Khan Sokummono Ms. Hong Vorleak Mr. Heam Hoeung Mr. Ra Ratha Ms. Ngorn Chansovy | N/A | 2 | 3 | 0 |
| EPP students/ alumni from other provinces | Ms. Khanra Soun (Phnom Penh) Ms. Keoritheha Um (Phnom Penh) Ms. Vecheka Nub (Province), Naluch Lim (Province) Mr. Reasmey Pornd | N/A | 1 | 3 | 1 |
| Research Grant alumni | Ms. Chenda Net Ms. Yan Sophorn Dr. Bophan Khan Mr. Nimul Chun Mr. Virak Nuon Dr. Om Chhorvoin | N/A | 4 | 2 | 0 |
| Short-course alumni | Strengthening Cabinet Operations and Public Sector Reform in Cambodia: Mr. H.E. LAO Poliveth Ouch Nipon, Under Secretary of State, Office of the Council of Ministers | Under Secretary of State, Office of the Council of Ministers | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Privately Funded Students/Alumni | Ms. Sophea Kim Ms. Somaly Leng Mr. Chankroesna Yong | N/A | 1 | 2 | 0 |
| Alumni | Mr. Lim Ymeng | Director of one window service, provincial administration. | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Alumni | Mr. Yat Yoeuy | Staff, Provincial Department of Agriculture, Fishery and Forestry (PDAFF) | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| EPP students | Mr. Toeum Mikado Ms. Phan Sreyphet Ms. Sokha Cheat Mr. Ly Rambo, | N/A | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| University | Mr. Tep Neavea | Vice Rector, National University of Battambang (NUBB) | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Alumni | Mr. Nhoem Sophorn Ms. Lenh Sotharoth | N/A | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| EPP students | Mr. Saun Bunkei Mr. Yoeum Phorn Mr. Blung Phat | N/A | 3 | 0 | 0 |

DFAT and ACIAR in Canberra

| Stakeholder Category | Contact | Role | M | F | Other |
|--------------------------------|--|--|-----|-----|-------|
| DFAT Canberra | Robyne Leven | Assistant Director, GEDSI Performance and Effectiveness Section, Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion Branch (GEB), DFAT | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| DFAT Canberra | Elizabeth (Lizzie) Smith | Assistant Director, DFAT GEB | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| DFAT Canberra | Fuchsia Hepworth | Assistant Director, DFAT Office of Southeast Asia (OSA) | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| DFAT Canberra | Jaci Lane | DFAT OSA | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| DFAT Canberra | Cynthia Ojambo | Assistant Director, DFAT Global Education and Scholarships (GLE) | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| DFAT Canberra | Rosie Welsh | DFAT Global Education and Scholarships (GLE) | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| ACIAR Canberra | Kate Turner-Mann | Director, Capacity Development | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| DFAT Hanoi Post | Nguyen Thi-Hang | Senior Program Manager, HRD | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| DFAT Hanoi Post | Le Minh-Nga | Program Officer, HRD | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| DFAT Jakarta Post | Sankalp Sheikhar | First Secretary, Scholarships and Alumni | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| DFAT Jakarta Post | Tetty Naibaho | Senior Program Manager, Scholarships and Alumni | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| DFAT Jakarta Post | Claudina Milawati | Unit Manager for Scholarships and Alumni | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| DFAT Vientiane Post | Dalavieng Thiladej | Senior Program Officer, HRD | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Australian National University | Debbie Yee | Sponsored Student Officer Australian National University | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Australian National University | Liz Ingram | Manager of International Recruitment and Alumni (Crawford School of Public Policy) | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Flinders University | Odile Ruijs | Relationships Mngt, International, Flinders University Partnerships (Sponsor Relations) | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Flinders University | Cassie Ankers | International Student Advisor, Flinders University | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| RMIT | Jamie Lowe | Student Contact Officer, RMIT | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Victoria University | Johnny Ko | International Scholarships Coordinator, Victoria University | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| University of Canberra | Timea Hrivik | Student Contact Officer | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| University of Sydney | Annie Dinh | Sponsored Student Officer, International Recruitment | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| University of Sydney | Ben Lavelle Wilson | Sponsored Students Assistant, | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| On-award scholars | ANU: | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| On-award scholars | Melb: Sok Sovanrotha Phay Chanrothana | Master of Law student Master of Education student | 2 | 0 | 0 |

Total number of stakeholders: 47 male, 61 female, 1 other.

Annex H: List of Key Documents

Program Design and Implementation Documents

- Australia Awards Cambodia Investment Design Document (IDD)
- Australia Awards Cambodia Program Logic (IDD version, current)
- Annual Plans (all years)
- Annual Reports (all years)
- Budget summaries (FY23, FY25)
- Strategic Planning Session Report (all years)
- AAC Program Achievement Infographics (all years)
- Australia Awards Cambodia Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Framework 2022
- Mid Term Review 2021 and DFAT Management Response
- Investment Monitoring Reports (all years)
- Partner Performance Assessments (all years)

Program Monitoring and Performance Data

- On-award and post-award survey datasets and summary analyses
- Tracer/ADIS studies and alumni case studies (including from the Global Tracer Facility)
- Equity Pathways Program (EPP) Old and New Approach (2025) and participation data
- Records of alumni engagement activities
- Alumni Research Grant List
- AAC program MEL tools (e.g. case studies on EPP, OAE)
- OASIS data on awardees (disaggregated by gender, disability, province, level of study, sector.)
- Mekong Australia Partnership – Building Human Capacity Pillar Completion Report 2024

DFAT Strategic and Thematic Guidance

- Australia–Cambodia Development Partnership Plan 2025-2029
- Cambodia Alumni Engagement Strategy 2021-2025
- DFAT International Development Policy 2024
- DFAT International Gender Equality Strategy 2025
- DFAT International, Disability Equity and Rights Strategy 2024
- DFAT Ethical Research and Evaluation Guidance Note 2021
- DFAT Design and Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Standards 2023

Cambodian National Development and Sector Strategies

- RGC Pentagonal Strategy (Phase I) 2023
- RGC Education Strategic Plan 2024-2028
- RGC Climate Change Strategic Plan 2024-2033
- RGC National Disability Strategic Plan 2024-2028
- RGC Neary Rattanak VI Strategic Plan 2024-2028

Global and Regional Documents

- Invested: Australia’s Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040
- Australia Awards Global Monitoring and Evaluation Framework 2022

- Comparative designs / reviews of AAS in other Southeast Asian countries (including Indonesia, Laos, Philippines, and Vietnam)

Annex I: Program Logic 2018

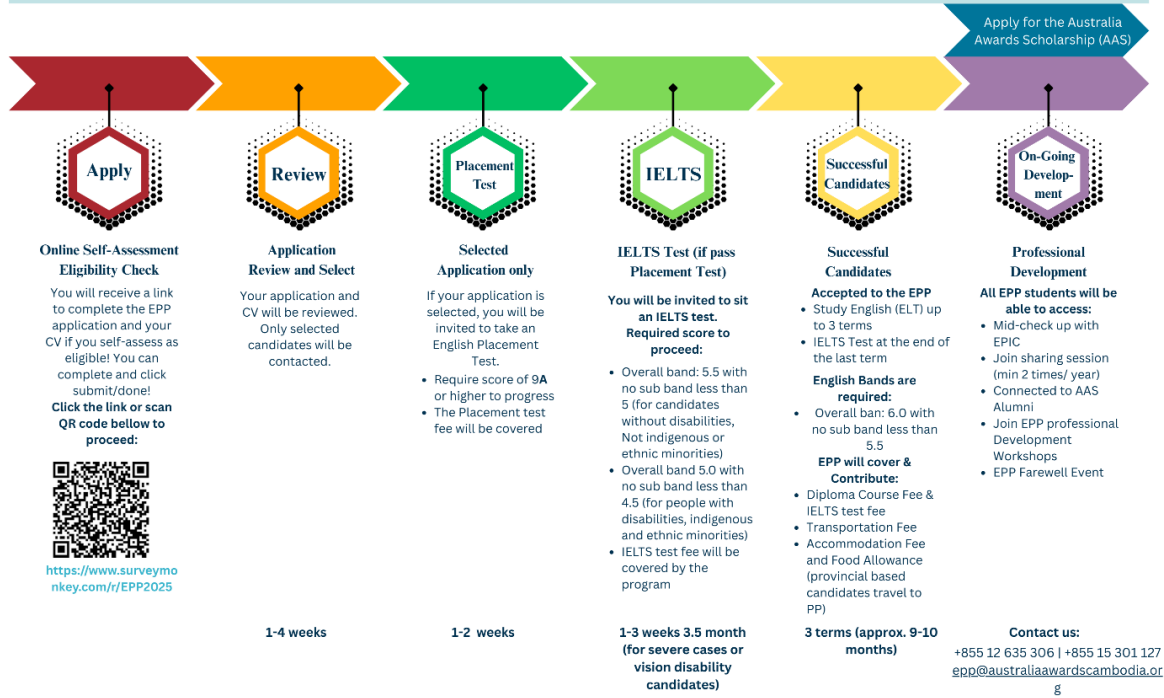
| | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|---|--|
| Goal | Cambodia progresses its development goals and has positive relationships with Australia that advance mutual interests | | | | |
| Outcomes | Alumni are using their skills, knowledge and networks to contribute to sustainable development | Alumni are contributing to cooperation between Australia and Cambodia | Effective, mutually advantageous partnerships exist between institutions and businesses in Australia and Cambodia | Stakeholders view Australia, Australians and Australian expertise positively | |
| Intermediate & Enabling Outcomes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alumni have necessary skills and knowledge to contribute to development Alumni have relevant and useful networks and relationships Employers deploy alumni so they can use their skills, knowledge and networks Employers remain engaged with Awardees and Fellows DFAT works with RGC in strategic planning processes | | | | |
| Outputs | Awardees/Fellows and their families have a positive experience of life in Australia | Awardees/Fellows complete good quality, relevant education, training, other profession development and research activities | Awardees/Fellows build relationships with Australians, other awardees and Australian institutions and businesses | Institutions and businesses in Australia and Cambodia undertake useful and relevant collaboration | |
| Inputs | Strategic Planning | | | | |
| | The strategic planning process led by DFAT and supported by the contractor will identify sectors, organisations and individuals the investment will target, in line with the investment's outcomes. The strategic planning process will be reviewed annually to reflect any changes in policy or budget, as well as incorporate any lessons learned. | | | | |
| | Australia Awards Scholarships <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Aimed at future change makers/high potential individuals Provides skills development in | Australia Awards Short Courses <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Address specific skill gaps Provide opportunities for women and senior staff in key areas | Australia Awards Fellowships <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Develop connections between government, business and non-government organisations in Australia and | Alumni <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Support people and organisational links and networks Skill enhancement | Support Activities <ol style="list-style-type: none"> English language and pre-departure support Equitable access On-award engagement Post award engagement |

Annex J: New and Old EPP Approach

| Category | Old | New (from 2025) |
|----------------------------------|---|--|
| Target Outcome | EPP participants can apply for the next or subsequent AAS Intake round i.e. meet eligibility criteria of at least IELTS 6.0 with no sub-band less than 5.5 | No change |
| Target Participants | Women People with disability Men and women who live and work in the provincial areas of Cambodia Members of indigenous and ethnic minorities Other equity groups, incl. LGBTQIA+ individuals | No change |
| Targeting | AAS Unsuccessful Pipeline – Candidates who applied for AAS but were not successful. Hard-Copy or Soft-Copy Applications – Available upon request Online Application – The main channel introduced in late 2023, with an eligibility check system. Walk-in or Referral – Through direct inquiries or partner referrals (e.g., NGOs, DPOs, DAC). | No change |
| Application Process | Online and offline | No change |
| Eligibility | Meet AAS eligibility criteria other than English* | No change |
| *English application test | ACE Placement test – score at least Level 7A | Still ACE Placement test Required score raised from Level 7A to Level 9A |
| English language training course | Enrolled in scheduled ACE diploma classes, aligned with skill area/s of need – up to 2 or 3 terms | Tailored approach open only to EPP students. Up to 3 or 4 terms Customised ELT and IELTS Preparation Collaborative Learning with Other EPP Students Strengthening General English Language Skills and Knowledge Progressive Preparation for IELTS, Building Step by Step Across Terms Collaborative Learning with Other EPP Students Results to date Over 90% Class Participation ACE–IELTS Assessment Approach: Most students improved their IELTS score by 0.5 band within one to two terms Advanced IELTS Focus on Advanced IELTS Preparation Intensive learning, practice activities, and mock tests for students who are ready to sit the exit IELTS test in the EPP program Results to date |

| Category | Old | New (from 2025) |
|---|--|--|
| | | <p>16/18 (89%) of students obtained end ACE-IELTS Equivalent test overall band 6.0 or higher</p> <p>More than 50% of EPP students achieved the required IELTS score to apply for AAS after completing just one term under the new approach. In comparison, under the old approach only 65% of students were able to reach the required IELTS score after studying for three terms.</p> |
| Mentoring | <p>Check-ins with Equity Pathways and Inclusion Coordinator</p> <p>Introduction to, and support from, AAS alumni as mentors (EPP Friends Network)</p> <p>Sharing sessions</p> | No change |
| Professional development (aims to improve capacity to compete in the merit-based selection process) | <p>Earlier career planning workshops re-designed to:</p> <p>Effective writing workshops - skills relevant to the preparation of a sound application</p> <p>Effective speaking workshops - preparation and performance at interview</p> | No change except effective speaking workshops expanded to include a mock interview component - opportunity for role play and practice to develop confidence and receive peer feedback |
| Support for people with disability | Lack of understanding and capacity issues supporting people with disability | <p>Still lack of understanding and capacity issues supporting people with disability – but generally more awareness and focus, although this depends to a large degree on the individual teacher and their attitude/willingness to support</p> <p>There is still a 3-month lead-time to test visually impaired applicants and other extreme disability cases.</p> |
| Cost per student per term (10 weeks) | USD 290 | USD 203 |

Equity Pathways Program (EPP) Roadmap



Annex K: Response to 2021 MTR Recommendations

The following table summarises the status of response to the MTR recommendations as at September 2025. DFAT management response was 'Agree' to all recommendations except #2.

Recommendations and Status

- 1. The Embassy, led by the DHOM, AAC leadership and relevant Cambodian counterparts work together to consider whether there is strategic advantage in focusing on priority sectors and/or organisations, as well as increasing the use of the short course / professional development modality in light of changes to the development context and operational lessons identified**

Ongoing. The issue of prioritisation has been discussed at annual DFAT Strategic Planning Sessions, is actively discussed by the AAC and the DFAT Post.

Short courses and informal learning opportunities have been delivered by AAC under the MAP Building Human Capital Pillar. Discussion between the AAC and the DFAT Post on the delivery of short course training to meet RGC requests are on-going.

- 2. The Embassy consider whether representatives of focus sectors and/or Ministries, NGOs and private sector organisations might be invited, on an ad hoc basis, to the Annual Strategic Review with the CDC.**

Ongoing. Representatives from the Personnel and Planning/HR Departments of a number of priority RGC Ministries were invited to attend the 2024 Annual Strategic Review with CDC. Discussion between AAC and the DFAT Post regarding further RGC ministry attendance at Strategic Planning meetings is ongoing.

- 3. The Tetra Tech contract for delivery of the AAC program should be extended to facilitate continued implementation of the program to May 2026**

Completed. Contract extended to 10 May 2006.

- 4. The contract for implementation of the AAC to May 2026 should focus on the current Outcomes 1 and 2 and require the MC to produce an improved program logic which clearly defines the links between outputs, intermediate outcomes and outcomes.**

Completed. New MEL Plan was submitted to the DFAT Post in November 2022 and approved by DFAT in March 2023

- 5. The Deputy Team Leader position should be specifically tasked with overall responsibility for AAC financial planning and management and existing arrangements for the provision of financial assistance support from within the AAC team should be reviewed and upgraded.**

Completed. As approved by DFAT, from August 2022, the new Team Leader assumed direct overall responsibility for AA financial planning and management. This role is supported by a national Finance and Administration Manager (appointed in December 2022).

- 6. The Embassy to liaise with the contractor representative to ensure that the new Corporate Chart of Accounts and Dashboard facilitate financial analysis linking expenditure to results overall, as well as analysis of the relative value-for-money of program components and activities in contributing to outcomes.**

Substantively Completed. A new Program Finance Workbook has been developed to be a ‘one-stop’ for all program finances. Meaningful linking of activity expenditure and proportioning it to a range of relevant outcomes is challenging. A value for money section was introduced in Annual Reporting.

7. **Estimate the increased demand on human resources required to integrate the MAP, particularly during the first twelve months and to ensure that adequate budget and recruitment arrangements are in place to meet that demand.**

Completed. MAP resourced through the DTL position from Nov 2022, and 0.4 FTE role of Short Course Adviser, with support of the Team Leader, until MAP ended in June 2024.

8. **A single position in the AAC team should be designated to have functional responsibility for ensuring that the communications deliverables are timely, of high quality and responsive to the requests of the Team Leader and the Embassy.**

Completed. In February 2023, the DFAT Post approved that the Alumni Engagement and Communications role be divided into 2 roles – Alumni Engagement Manager and Communications and Events Coordinator- to best address the alumni engagement and communications requirements of the program.

9. **Conduct a financial analysis to determine whether the budget allocation for deployment of gender expertise is sufficient to achieve gender equality related results and advise the Embassy accordingly.**

Substantively Completed. The DFAT Post requested AAC access GEDSI expertise through the Embassy GEDSI adviser. This role is now vacant. The DFAT Post has advised that, at this stage, the AAC does not need support of additional GEDSI expertise.

10. **Consider the cost/benefit aspects of the current approach to disability inclusion in order to determine whether there is scope to benefit more people with disabilities for the same investment and advise the Embassy accordingly.**

Substantively Completed. The AAC and the DFAT Post have had ongoing discussions regarding support for people with disabilities. The ‘Dare to Dream’ campaign and other outreach initiatives have strengthened the pipeline of people with disability being supported under the EPP.

11. **Task AAC to build upon the basic AA Global M&E systems to ensure that the AAC M&E system is ‘fit-for-purpose’ in meeting the performance information needs of the program and the Embassy.**

Completed. The updated MEL Plan was approved by the DFAT Post in March 2023. More analysis has been included in AAC Annual Reports and other documents, which was acknowledged by the DFAT Post.

12. **Conduct a financial analysis to determine whether the expertise and budget allocation for M&E is adequate to meet the proposed development of a ‘fit-for-purpose’ M&E system and advise the Embassy accordingly.**

Completed. An outsourcing model using local alumni was implemented to expand the evidence base (for example through the Alumni Development Impact Survey and case studies) of the program. There has been an increase in MEL spend over the last three years

13. **Work with the AAA-C Board to develop a Partnership Agreement outlining shared objectives and principles, as well as commitments, including DFAT’s commitment to strengthen the sustainability of the AAA-C and the association’s commitment to support the Embassy’s bilateral cooperation objectives.**

Ongoing. The role of the AAA-C Board has continued to be discussed by the AAC and the DFAT Post. The AAC has established a good working relationship with the new Board (elected in Dec 2022)– positioning AAA-C as the face of alumni engagement – without a documented charter. The current AAA-C regularly raises the re-introduction of funding for a Secretariat.

14. Expand the scope and budget of the PE Strategy to facilitate operational and capacity building support for the AAA-C.

Substantively Completed. The support/budget for the AAA-C has been increased (for example in use of a subscription for Coursera for newly elected board members). AAC has been supporting a part-time AAA-C intern. Resourcing expansion of support from AAC through the Equity and Program Quality Advisor role was not continued after their resignation in April 2022.

Annex L: Cambodia's Development Context

This annex is drawn from relevant sections of the he Australia–Cambodia Development Partnership Plan (DPP) 2025–2029

Sustainable Economic Growth

Since the 1990s peace process, Cambodia has made significant progress in reducing poverty, expanding the economy and addressing key human development challenges. These achievements were underpinned by decades of sustained economic growth at an average of 7 per cent per annum, maintaining Cambodia's position as the world's 11th fastest growing economy.

Cambodia's economy is recovering from recessionary forces and the global economic downturn caused by COVID-19, both of which have been compounded by multifaceted geopolitical challenges. The manufacturing sector has been the primary driver of this recovery, thanks to stronger-than-expected international demand for exports. Agriculture has remained relatively stable and continues its steady contribution to the economy. While this sector remains the largest employer (with up to 36 per cent of the workforce engaged in agriculture), its contribution to gross domestic product (GDP) is expected to decline year on year as Cambodia transitions to upper middle-income status. Tourism underpinned a third of Cambodia's GDP prior to COVID-19. This sector is recovering, albeit slowly, due to shifts in tourist demographics and spending patterns. Other key factors influencing Cambodia's medium-term economic prospects include slower-than-expected growth, high rates of private debt, slowing domestic investments and a subdued construction sector.

The economy has grown despite being underpinned by a narrow economic base that is reliant on high levels of foreign direct investment concentrated in few sectors, primarily manufacturing, construction, tourism and agriculture. However, the productivity gains in these sectors have been realised and are unlikely to drive future growth at the same rate. Existing development challenges are also expected to compound these vulnerabilities, including poor competitiveness, growing inequality, low levels of human capital, declining labour productivity, poor infrastructure, high business operating costs and vulnerability to climate change.

Poverty Reduction

Cambodia has achieved significant poverty reduction over the past two decades. Prior to COVID-19, Cambodia's poverty rate steadily declined from 33.8 per cent in 2009 to a low of 17.8 per cent in 2019–20. Despite this progress, Cambodia remains the second poorest country in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and has seen an increasing wealth disparity between socioeconomic groups. Many Cambodians live only slightly above the poverty line and remain vulnerable to shocks. As of 2020, 17.8 per cent of the population sits below the national poverty line of USD2.7 per person per day. However, the World Bank estimates that, overall, 32 per cent of the population is currently under the poverty line or at risk of poverty, with 15 per cent of the population sitting within USD 0.70 of the poverty line. This inequality is reflected in Cambodia's low Human Development Index (HDI) ranking. With an HDI of 0.600 in 2022 and ranking 148th globally, Cambodia continues to face significant challenges in addressing inequality and poverty despite decades of progress.

Human Development

Cambodia has worked with partners over the past two decades to establish social protection policies and systems. The value of these efforts was demonstrated during COVID-19. They enabled a swift national scale-up and rollout of social protection measures, including household cash transfers, to mitigate the pandemic's most acute impacts on marginalised populations. As a result of these measures, more than five million Cambodians (one-third of the population) are now covered by the social protection system, which has kept many households from falling below the poverty line. However, opportunities remain to improve social protection coverage, given Cambodia's system is in its infancy. Many Cambodians still lack adequate social protection. The system does not adequately address the needs of women or people living with disability, and many of the institutions responsible for implementing social protection measures lack sufficient technical expertise or capacity.

A healthy population is essential for economic growth and the reduction of inequality. Poor health outcomes threaten to increase poverty and exacerbate the financial burden of health care on individuals and government. Health outcomes in Cambodia have improved considerably over the past 20 years. Life expectancy at birth has steadily increased, maternal and infant mortality rates have declined, childhood immunisation coverage has expanded, and the use of modern family planning methods has risen.

Despite these achievements, improving health outcomes remains a key development challenge and priority. Nearly 32 per cent of children aged under five years are stunted and child wasting is increasing, both of which contribute to developmental delays and increased adult health risks. The healthcare system remains constrained by the capacity of healthcare providers, as Cambodia has the lowest number of skilled healthcare professionals of all ASEAN countries.

Cambodia recognises that access to education is critical for human and economic development. Cambodia has made notable progress in terms of access to education over the past two decades. The national enrolment rate for primary education, for example, rose to 90 per cent in 2019. Despite improved access, this progress has not translated to better educational outcomes, beyond primary levels. A key cause of poor school performance is the lack of access to high-quality training for Cambodia's teachers. Few teachers receive quality formal training, and inadequate teacher distribution compounds access and capacity constraints. Cambodia has consistently higher ratios of students to teachers than its ASEAN peers, with 45 to 60 students per class (often higher in rural areas). Economic pressures and poor school performance are the two most common reasons parents provide for not enrolling children.

Governance, Institutions and Fiscal Stability

Public institutions have played a pivotal role in Cambodia's development over the past two decades. Businesses in Cambodia are keen to reiterate that improvements in governance and political stability are key contributors to increased investor confidence and economic growth. Over the past two decades, Cambodia has made concerted efforts to improve the collection and mobilisation of domestic revenue. As a result, tax revenues rose from 10.4 per cent of GDP in 2005 to 25.1 per cent in 2019 – one of the highest rates in ASEAN. Positively, Cambodia has also maintained relatively low debt at around 35 per cent of GDP to support public spending. The World Bank and International Monetary Fund still rate Cambodia at a low risk of debt distress. However, these buffers are in decline.

Cambodia is committed to public institutional strengthening and fiscal reforms to meet its economic and human development ambitions. Within government, institutional capacity remains mixed, both horizontally

between national-level ministries and vertically to the subnational level. Fiscal vulnerabilities are particularly acute in the social sector.

Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI)

Cambodia's people have not benefited equally from the human development and economic progress realised to date.

Gender inequality remains an ongoing challenge. Cambodia is ranked 102 out of 146 countries on the Global Gender Gap index, with women earning an average of 19 per cent less than men and 58.4 per cent of women engaging in vulnerable employment in the informal sector. Gender-based violence (GBV) is widespread, with more than one in five Cambodian women reported to have experienced some form of emotional, physical or sexual violence. Support systems and services are not keeping pace with the needs of survivors. Safe houses are lacking, and psychosocial and survivor support programs remain limited.

Disability is prevalent in Cambodia. There are significant gaps in access to services for people with disability. Disability-specific services tend to cater to physical and mobility-related disabilities and have higher uptake by men. Infrastructure accessibility, including transport, remains a barrier to gaining employment and accessing services. Social attitudes and traditional beliefs can restrict support to people with disability and limit the awareness of psychosocial and cognitive disabilities. Consequently, households that include a person with disability are twice as likely to fall below the poverty line.

To address these challenges, Cambodia has introduced national legislative initiatives and policies that focus on advancing GEDSI. However, their implementation remains limited by insufficient dedicated funding from the national budget.

While the rights of Indigenous people are recognised in the constitution, access to education remains a challenge (66 per cent have not completed any basic education) and representation of Indigenous people in decision-making is relatively new.

Although Cambodia has made significant strides towards better inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual and identity-diverse (LGBTQIA+) people, including steps to incorporate LGBTQIA+ sensitive curriculum in schools, recognition and formal protections of rights remain limited. LGBTQIA+ communities continue to face discrimination and exclusion at home and school, in the workplace and when accessing public services.

Climate Change

Cambodia is highly vulnerable to climate change. It has one of the world's highest levels of exposure to floods and extreme heat, which is expected to negatively affect Cambodia's labour productivity, education and health outcomes, crop yields and tourism. The impacts of climate change are expected to amplify Cambodia's existing challenges and have potentially sizeable effects on development, trade, debt and poverty reduction. Cambodia's economy remains highly dependent on trade and foreign investment. Global efforts to decarbonise and changing consumption patterns directly affect the economy. Building resilience to mitigate and respond to the impacts of climate change will be essential for Cambodia's future. Without action, these impacts could reduce Cambodia's GDP by up to 9 per cent by 2050 and increase poverty rates by up to 6 percentage points by 2040.

Annex M: Program Results: Australia Awards Cambodia

PROGRAM RESULTS

Australia Awards Cambodia

ALUMNI ARE USING THEIR SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE, AND NETWORKS TO CONTRIBUTE TO CAMBODIA'S SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (EOIO1)

75% had passed on their knowledge and skills to others

84% had introduced improved practices and innovation in the workplace

ALUMNI ARE CONTRIBUTING TO COOPERATION BETWEEN AUSTRALIA AND CAMBODIA (EOIO 2)

6% reported coordinating mutual agreements with Australian organisations

9% reported facilitating collaborative work with Australian organisations.

IN CONTRIBUTING TO THESE OUTCOMES:

97% viewed Australia and Australian expertise positively (IO1);

Acquisition of relevant skills and knowledge (IO2); and

84% had built networks with Australians, Australian organisations and each other (IO3).

Annex N: Program Logic 2018

Goal

Cambodia progresses its development goals and has positive relationships with Australia that advance mutual interests

Outcomes

- Alumni are using their skills, knowledge and networks to contribute to sustainable development
Alumni are contributing to cooperation between Australia and Cambodia
Effective, mutually advantageous partnerships exist between institutions and businesses in Australia and Cambodia
Stakeholders view Australia, Australians and Australian expertise positively

Intermediate & Enabling Outcomes

- Alumni have necessary skills and knowledge to contribute to development
- Alumni have relevant and useful networks and relationships
- Employers deploy alumni so they can use their skills, knowledge and networks
- Employers remain engaged with Awardees and Fellows
- DFAT works with RGC in strategic planning processes
- DFAT engages with awardees, fellows, organisations and leaders in priority areas

Outputs

- Awardees/Fellows and their families have a positive experience of life in Australia
- Awardees/Fellows complete good quality, relevant education, training, and other professional development and research activities
- Awardees/Fellows build relationships with Australians, other awardees and Australian institutions and businesses
- Institutions and businesses in Australia and Cambodia undertake useful and relevant collaboration

Strategic Planning

The strategic planning process led by DFAT and supported by the contractor will identify sectors, organisations and individuals the investment will target, in line with the investment's outcomes. The strategic planning process will be reviewed annually to reflect any changes in policy or budget, as well as incorporate any lessons learned.

Inputs

Australia Awards Scholarships

1. Aimed at future change makers/high potential individuals
2. Provides skills development in priority sectors

Australia Awards Short Courses

1. Address specific skills gaps
2. Provide opportunities for women and senior staff in key areas or sectors

Australia Awards Fellowships

1. Develop connections between government, business and non-government organisations in Australia and Cambodia
2. Build capacity and skills of key individuals

Alumni

1. Support people and organisational links and networks
2. Skill enhancement

Support Activities

1. English language and pre-departure support
2. Equitable access
3. On-award engagement
4. Post-award engagement

Annex O: Equity Pathways Program (EPP) Roadmap

Equity Pathways Program (EPP) Roadmap

Apply for the Australia Awards Scholarship (AAS)

Apply

Online Self-Assessment Eligibility Check

You will receive a link to complete the EPP application and your CV if you self-assess as eligible! You can complete and click submit/done!

Click the link or scan QR code below to proceed:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/EPP2025>

Review

Application Review and Select

Your application and CV will be reviewed. Only selected candidates will be contacted.

Placement Test

Selected Application only

If your application is selected, you will be invited to take an English Placement Test.

- Require score of 9A or higher to progress
- The Placement test fee will be covered

IELTS

IELTS Test (if pass Placement Test)

You will be invited to sit an IELTS test.

Required score to proceed:

- Overall band: 5.5 with no sub band less than 5 (for candidates without disabilities, not indigenous or ethnic minorities)
- Overall band 5.0 with no sub band less than 4.5 (for people with disabilities, indigenous and ethnic minorities)
- IELTS test fee will be covered by the program

Successful Candidates

Successful Candidates Accepted to the EPP

- Study English (ELT) up to 3 terms
- IELTS Test at the end of the last term

English Bands are required:

- Overall band: 6.0 with no sub band less than 5.5

EPP will cover & Contribute:

- Diploma Course Fee & IELTS test fee

- Transportation Fee
- Accommodation Fee and Food Allowance (provincial based candidates travel to PP) 3 terms (approx. 9–10 months)

On-Going Development

Professional Development

All EPP students will be able to access:

Mid-check up with EPIC

- Join sharing session (min 2 times/year)
- Connected to AAS Alumni
- Join EPP professional Development Workshops
- EPP Farewell Event

Timeline notes:

Apply: 1–4 weeks

Placement Test: 1–2 weeks

IELTS: 1–3 weeks, 3.5 months (for severe cases or vision disability candidates)

Contact us:

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