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Cambodia, Overcoming Hardships, Rebuilds its Education System

by Stephen C. Dunnett

It is estimated that there will soon be approximately 25,000 Cambodian students eligible for higher education study. As academic and foreign language skills improve, many of these students will also soon be eligible for study in institutions of higher education overseas.

Cambodia has no restrictions on students who wish to study abroad, providing they have the necessary funds to do so. Since human resource development is one of the highest priorities for Cambodia, it may be anticipated that the Cambodian government in the future will strongly encourage its best qualified students to study abroad.

Various non-governmental organizations are sponsoring students to study overseas, especially in Thailand, France, Canada, Australia and the United States.

A few American universities have also begun to offer scholarships and fellowships for Cambodian students. The recently reopened U.S. embassy in Phnom Penh will grant a limited number of Fulbright travel grants for academic year 1993-94.

The various Cambodian government ministries have established committees to assist their employees in obtaining scholarships for overseas studies.

At the moment, it is difficult for Cambodian students to obtain information about the procedures for applying to overseas universities and col-

International Trends

leges, as well as about overseas academic program offerings.

It is also difficult for many graduate students who received their education prior to the Khmer Rouge takeover to document their former academic studies since their credentials were destroyed. Foreign admissions officers will be confronted with incomplete and unfamiliar transcripts, some of which will bear the names of defunct or reorganized institutions of higher education. There will also be many problems in establishing equivalencies of diplomas and determining the various levels of education attained.

The Toll of War

In the 1960s Cambodia had one of the highest literary rates and most pro-

gressive education systems in Southeast Asia. The University of Phnom Penh was a showpiece for visiting foreign education leaders, and thousands of young Cambodians were pursuing university studies abroad, especially in the United States and France.

Less than 20 years later, as a result of U.S. carpet bombing in the 1970s and the Khmer Rouge "agrarian socialist revolution," Cambodia was without an education system.

Along with the two million Cambodians killed (one-fifth of the country's population), were 80 percent of the country's 25,000 teachers and academics, and most of its trained and educated professionals. By 1979, Cambodia was a ruined country, with fewer than 50 doctors and less than 5,000 teachers.

Under the Khmer Rouge regime the economic and social structure of the country was virtually destroyed. During the Khmer Rouge era there was no formal classroom education in Cambodia, and institutions of higher education, public schools and libraries were destroyed or put to other uses such as communal kitchens, dormitories, prisons or storehouses. Books, teaching materials, libraries and laboratories were systematically destroyed.

The re-establishment of an education system was one of the highest priorities of the new govern-



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The Readership Poll

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Address correspondence to:
World Education News & Reviews
P.O. BOX 745, Old Chelsea Station
New York, N.Y. 10113-0745
Tel: 212-966-6311
FAX: 212-966-6395
BITNET: NYWES@CUNYVM

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While returns are still trickling in from the annual WENR readership survey, an impressive 14 percent of subscribers shot back their response within the one-month deadline.

Seventy percent of those who answered are admission officers or credential evaluators, 20 percent described themselves as foreign student advisors, 11 percent fell into the category of international program administrators, followed closely by study abroad advisors and faculty members.


Although respondents deal mostly with students from China, Japan, India, Taiwan, the U.K. and Malaysia, the information you want to have in future issues is about other countries—the ones you don't encounter every day. Thirty-nine percent want more information about east Europe and the former USSR. Almost as many want to learn more about western European countries. Sixteen percent need updates on Latin America, and 13 percent want more on China.

Overwhelmingly, 78 percent value WENR because we are "informative" and "timely."

We thank you all for taking the time to answer. Most of all, we appreciate your overwhelming support and awareness of our publishing goals. WENR has made a special effort to put forth issues and ideas that have been made marginal, such as Jamil Salmi's "Education Crisis in Developing Countries."

Whenever possible, we seek out primary sources for our articles—authors from the countries being presented, who have first-hand knowledge to give. Golnar Mehran writing on Islamic influence in Iran, Ana Longo updating us on her native Chile, and Yue-ping Chung allowing us a real insider's view of education in Hong Kong are excellent examples.

You've helped set important guidelines for us to follow in the year ahead, and WENR intends to keep right on giving you the information you need and value so highly.

■ 



COUNTRY UPDATES

Albania

■ Education continues to undergo reform. At present, there are eight years of compulsory education for children aged 6-14 years, grades 1-8.

Secondary education, grades 9-12, prepares students either for a technician level qualification or for university studies. It is offered in general secondary schools, vocational schools, and in schools which train teachers, nurses, mid-wives, specialists in foreign languages, sport, the arts, etc. The length of studies in all kinds of secondary schools is currently four years.

Higher education is offered at seven universities, one Academy of Fine Arts and one Institute.

Secondary education is the main focus of current reform efforts. Four principal groupings are envisaged: general, professional, vocational and arts/sport.

The new vocational schools will have increased flexibility with shortened periods of study (2-3 years), and will aim to prepare students for employment in the various branches of industry, trade and commerce.

General secondary schools will have two levels, each lasting two years. This will enable students to enter the labor market after two years or to go on to university after four years. Emphasis also will be placed on improving secondary education in rural areas and ensuring adequate training of specialists in agriculture. (*Newsletter/Faits nouveaux* 4/92)

Argentina

■ Buenos Aires was the site in November of the first of a series of regional meetings on academic accreditation and standards under the sponsorship of the International Association of University Presidents.

The Association, representing universities in Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay, is trying to integrate their activities in order to make the most of their limited resources. None of the countries has an accreditation agency or mechanism for the external monitoring of academic standards.

The universities want to develop a common curricula, but it will not be easy. In Argentina alone, 66 universities offer more than 1,400 different programs, making comparisons long and difficult. Argentine educators expect that pressure from abroad will force them to agree on a common curricula eventually, thus eliminating the country's biggest obstacle to student mobility. The first step will be to define criteria and terminology to talk about credits and accreditation before programs can be compared. (*The Chronicle of Higher Education* 2/3/93)

Australia

■ Australian higher education has experienced another year of upheaval, turmoil and change on a massive scale, the sort of thing academics have become accustomed to over the past five years.

There were protests by lecturers over pay rises for vice chancellors in January, riots by students over a new loan scheme in April, and calls by universities for more money throughout the year.

The higher education minister, Peter Baldwin, saw the last of Labor's reforms put in place mid-year, with the final demolition of the binary divide. When the Royal Melbourne and the Swinburne institutes of technology were officially designated universities, 25 years of Australian advanced education ended.

Although higher education can now look forward to more than A\$14 billion in spending over the next three years, whatever the government provides will never be enough. The Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee is urging the government to create an extra 18,000 university places over the next three years, with half earmarked for the increasingly lucrative postgraduate business. Postgraduates must often pay 10 times the fees charged undergraduate students.

Two big issues that have dominated the year are quality and competency.

In November, the government outlined how universities would be subject for the first time to quality assessment. A national committee is to be set up to report on how universities monitor quality and improve standards.

There was far less consensus over the matter of competency. Vice chancellors reacted with alarm at the spread of competency-based training in technical and further education colleges and schools. But as the notion of competency and recognition of prior learning has spread, it has become clear that universities are going to be caught up by the wave however hard they may try to escape. (*The Times Higher Education Supplement* 1/1/93)

Austria

■ Austria's education system, long viewed as one of Europe's most conservative, would undergo sweeping modernization if lawmakers pass reforms now being considered in parliament.

continued

The legislation would increase the autonomy of the country's 12 universities and six other higher education institutions, and introduce more competition and accountability into university research and teaching. Currently, Austria's higher education system is highly centralized, with the ministry hiring all professors and telling the universities exactly how to spend the money it provides.

The law would hand those powers over to individual institutions. It also would challenge the privileged position of Austria's professors by allowing institutions to hire non-tenured instructors for the first time.

The announced aim is to "de-bureaucratize" higher education and make the universities more dynamic. The legislation comes at a time of growing criticism of declining standards and overcrowding in the universities, largely a result of a mid-1970s decision by the Social Democratic government to refocus the elite university system and provide education for the masses. In the two decades since then, enrollment has soared from under 40,000 to today's 200,000, without facilities and teaching staffs keeping pace. (*The Chronicle of Higher Education* 1/6/93)

Bahrain

■ Females comprise 57 percent of the 6,000 students currently enrolled at the University of Bahrain. The College of Engineering is the largest faculty with 1,715 students or 29 percent of total enrollment; next largest are the College of Business Administration with 1,419 students (24 percent); the College of Education with 1,058 students (18 percent); and the College of Arts with 933 students (15 percent). The College of Science has the least students with 875 (14 percent). The total number of faculty members is 408. (*HCJ Communications* 1/93)

Bulgaria

■ The former Karl Marx Higher Institute of Economics, located in Sofia, is now known as the University for Domestic and International Economics. (Correspondence from the Embassy of Bulgaria 1/29/93)

China

■ The foundation stone was laid in January for the Chinese Women's College in Beijing. It is expected to be completed in time for the Fourth World Conference of Women scheduled to be held in September 1995. China has more than 500 million women, 23

percent of the world's total. The new college is expected to encourage women to participate more in the country's social development. (*China Daily* 1/20/93)

■ Thousands of teachers in central China have not been paid for as long as seven months because of budget problems and rampant corruption among Communist Party officials.

The financial crisis in Sichuan province has forced more than 100 elementary school principals to resign because they can no longer feed their families.

The report is the latest example of how China's market-oriented economic reforms appear to be largely bypassing rural areas as China concentrates on building up urban coastal areas. The current crisis is attributed to the region's deteriorating economy, which is based mostly on revenues from agriculture. It is also said that local party officials have embezzled funds intended for teachers or diverted them to construction and other profit-making ventures. (*Gannett Suburban Newspapers* 1/22/93)

■ More international schools teaching traditional Chinese medicine are to be opened in the near future to help train foreign practitioners. China also is increasing international academic exchanges in medicine. The three international acupuncture training centers in Beijing, Nanjing and Shanghai have so far trained over 3,000 personnel from more than 130 countries and regions. Similar training centers have been set up in many countries. (*China Daily* 1/7/93)

Commonwealth of Independent States

■ In October 1992 the Ministers of Education of nine republics of the former USSR, at present independent states, met in Tashkent to discuss problems of cooperation in the field of education. The Ministers established the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education of the States members of the Commonwealth of Independent States/CIS. The Conference is to convene annually, with the next meeting scheduled in September.

All members of the CIS, with the exception of Moldova and Azerbaijan, have become members of the Conference, that is Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, the Ukraine and Uzbekistan. Lithuania attended as an observer.

One issue to be resolved is the mutual recognition of certificates/diplomas being awarded at present in States of the CIS. As the problem concerns secondary and higher education qualifications currently being awarded in each of the States, it was decided at the Conference that recognition should be treated on the basis of bilateral agreements. Such agreements are already being prepared between Russia and Estonia, Russia and Latvia and between other republics.

Still more complex is the problem of the mutual recognition

of academic degrees and titles. This problem did not exist in the context of the USSR when there was one system of academic degrees and titles, one procedure of their conferment, and one higher attestation commission. Now all States of the CIS are inclined to confer their own academic degrees and titles. The Ministers came to the conclusion that citizens could obtain academic degrees and titles in any of the States, but that each State would itself decide whether to recognize them.

At their September meeting, the Ministers will discuss national educational standards and the securing of educational rights for national minorities. (*Newsletter/Faits nouveaux* 4/92)

Estonia

■ Even though the Estonian education system was subordinated to the centralized Soviet education system from 1940, Estonia, unlike many small nations of the USSR, maintained instruction in the mother tongue at all educational levels. Since 1988, efforts have been made to come closer to Western European education systems.

At present, the Estonian education system has approximately 70,000 children in pre-school education, 234,000 students in general comprehensive schools, 35,600 in vocational institutions, and 25,600 in colleges and universities. Out of a total population of 1.5 million, half a million are from minority groups.

Radical changes in the political and economic situation have resulted in a great demand for in-service training and the upgrading of qualifications. At present, one in 50 of the population is pursuing some form of study and 164 out of every thousand are university students.

Alongside the State education system, a network of private schools has come into being.

Since 1989-90, schools have been using their own individual new syllabuses. From Grade 6, schools have the right to use one-third of the total amount of periods for optional subjects. Political subjects have been dropped and stress put on the humanities, especially on foreign languages.

Reforms are currently in the works for curricula, a handbook on teaching methodology, vocational education to fill the needs of society, and the formation of a network of educational institutions for adults. Teacher

training and competency testing also will be reformed. The Act of Education, passed by parliament in March 1992, creates the base for the further development of the educational system. (*Newsletter/Faits nouveaux* 4/92)

France

■ A reform in the *baccalauréat* has long been awaited. The changes proposed by Education Minister Jack Lang will not affect the status of the "bac"; it will remain the first higher education certificate and will maintain its national character.

The proposed changes will, however, affect the calculation of the coefficients:

● The major subjects in each track (see WENR Winter 1992, Vol. 6 #1) will account for 60 percent of all grades. All major subjects will have the same coefficient, 5 in the literary and economic/social tracks and 7 or 9 in the scientific track.

● This parity in the coefficients will also apply to the complementary general subjects where 3 will be the coefficient in all tracks. The only exception will be in the art electives of the literary track, where the coefficient will be 5 so as to preserve the particular

The Baccalauréat 1995

Coefficients of the three general tracks

COMPULSORY EXAMS	Literary Track L			Scientific Track S		Economic and Social Sciences Track ES		
		OPTIONS						
		LANGUAGE	MATH	ARTS				
MAJOR SUBJECTS	FRENCH	5	5	5	MATH	7	MATH	7
	PHILOSOPHY	5	5	5	PHYSICS	7	ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SCIENCES	5
	ML (1)	5	5	5	LIFE AND EARTH SCIENCES OR TECHNOLOGY	7	HISTORY - GEOGRAPHY	5
	HISTORY-GEOGRAPHY	5	5	5		9	FRENCH	5
COMPLEMENTARY SUBJECTS	SCIENCE	3	3	3	FRENCH	3	PHILOSOPHY	3
	ML 2 (2) OR ART OR CLG (3)	3	3	3	PHILOSOPHY	3	ML 1	3
	MATH	3	/	3	HISTORY-GEOGRAPHY	3	ML 2	3
	PHYS. ED. (4)	2	2	2	ML 1	3	PHYS. ED.	2
TOTAL		31	28	31		35 OR 37		31
ELECTIVE EXAMS								
OPTION 1	MATH (5)	/	5	/	LIFE AND EARTH SCIENCES	2	MATH	2
	ML 2 AND 3	2	/	/	MATH	2	ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SCIENCES	2
	CLG				PHYSICS / CHEMISTRY	2	ML 3	2
OPTION 2	ML 2, ML 3				ML 2, CLG, ML 3		ML 3, CLG	
	CLG				TECHNOLOGY		SCIENCE	
	LETTERS	1	1	1	ART	1	ART	1
WORKSHOPS		1	1	1	WORKSHOP	1	WORKSHOP	1

(1) Modern language 1. (2) Modern language 2. (3) Classical Latin-Greek (4) Sports and Physical Education (5) Students following this option are exempt from the corresponding complementary subject.

Source: *Le Monde de l'Education* 3/93

continued

