

Education and research

Strengthening ties in higher education

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From the moment of achieving independence, the government of Kazakhstan has placed a priority on the education of its citizens, and in doing so has forged many links with UK educational institutions. In 1993 the government of Kazakhstan launched its flagship Bolashak Programme, to support the acquisition of new skills and qualifications by Kazakh citizens through international study.

Taking its name from the Kazakh word for the future, by the time it celebrated its twentieth birthday in 2013 the prestigious Bolashak programme had seen more than 3,000 scholars come to study in the UK on under-graduate, post-graduate and doctoral programmes, making the UK the number one destination for Bolashak scholars. Over 140 Bolashak Fellows had also visited the UK for their research. Awarded to future leaders on an individual basis each year to train in economics, engineering, medicine and other key fields, the Bolashak Scholarship Programme continues to thrive, with the UK remaining one of the most popular places for scholars to undertake their studies.

In November 2000, then British Prime Minister Tony Blair and President of Kazakhstan H.E. Nursultan Nazarbayev signed a Memorandum of Understanding concerning the establishment of the Kazakh-British Technical University (KBTU). Arising from a concept of the President of Kazakhstan H.E. Nurayan Nazarbayev, the KBTU was formally established on August 3rd 2001 and from its beginning received consultative services from

the University of Aberdeen, Robert Gordon University and the University of Westminster (London).

In 2009 KBTU received the status of Affiliate Centre of the University of London. Due to this status, graduates of the faculty of KBTU International School of Economics receive a Diploma from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) alongside their KBTU Diploma. Undergraduate students of KBTU Business School can also include a year of study at the University of Northampton as part of their four-year course.

As a further example of local admiration for British educational establishments, 2008 saw the opening in Kazakhstan of the first British independent school in Central Asia, Haileybury-Almaty. A second school has now opened in Astana, its design a modernist take on Haileybury in the UK, with a large central tree-lined quad and amphitheatre. The co-educational schools teach the UK curriculum leading to the International Baccalaureate and follow the traditional British public school house system.

Traditionally, local higher education was offered in Kazakh and Russian, but study programmes taught in English are increasingly common, facilitating the exchange of students and research teams. Nazarbayev University, founded in 2009, was the first Kazakh institution to teach solely in English and, in partnership with University College London, the University offers a foundation year to prepare students for an undergraduate degree taught

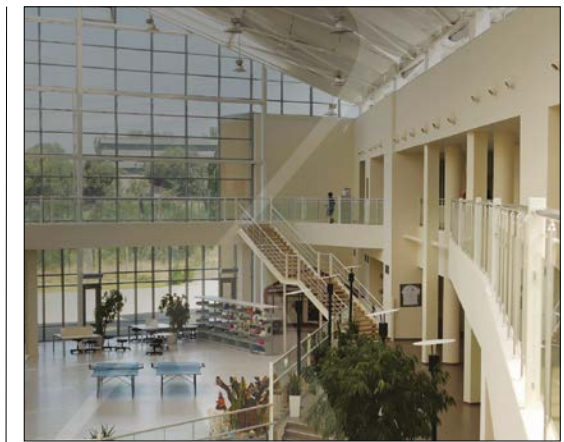
in English. The British Council in Kazakhstan is heavily involved in the teaching of English, and during the then Prime Minister David Cameron's visit in 2013 the British Council signed a contract to train Kazakh teachers at school and university level in the UK.

The Joint Statement on the Strategic Partnership signed in 2013 between the two countries included a commitment to continuing to strengthen educational ties.

"The Parties aim to forge stronger cultural and educational links, including supporting long-term partnerships between British and Kazakh higher education institutions, increasing research collaboration, especially in technical fields including sustainable energy, nanotechnology and biotechnology."

Shortly after this statement, 2014 saw the launch of the Newton-Al-Farabi Partnership Programme, a five-year, £20 million joint programme between the UK government and the government of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Coordinated by the JSC Science Fund for Kazakhstan and the British Council for the UK, the fund promotes the economic development and welfare of Kazakhstan through supporting research and innovation in energy, health and wellbeing, agri-technology, resilience and natural disasters, ecology and the environment and food and water.

One example of the work facilitated by the Newton-Al Farabi Partnership Programme was a workshop held in 2016 at Nazarbayev University, Astana, on Low Carbon Energy Future: Efficient Management of Resources, which brought together early career researchers from a range of UK and Kazakh universities. In the same year, Energy 2050, a research initiative between Sheffield University, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University and Nazarbayev University, received funding from the British Council for two workshops aimed at helping to address



the environmental and energy challenges facing Kazakhstan.

As a further example of this continuing commitment to further research ties between the two countries, in December 2016, Gumilyov Eurasian National University signed a memorandum with Cambridge University's Cavendish Laboratory to establish a Centre of Quantum Materials. Professor Siddarth Saxena of the Cavendish noted at the time

"Over the last ten years we have intensified our relationship with Kazakhstan, not only because of its development, but because of its intellectual potential."

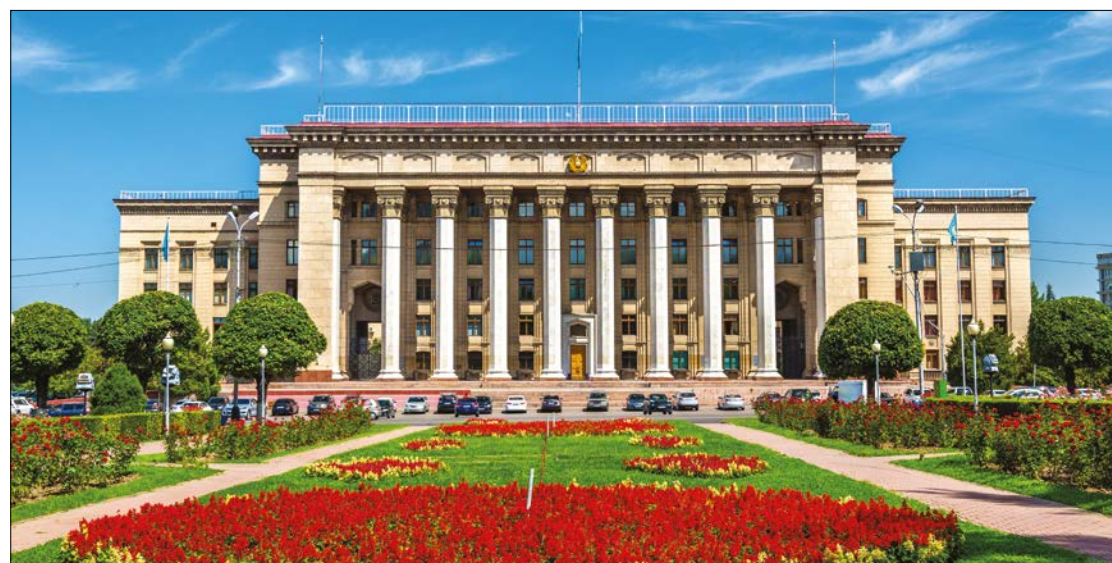
The collaboration has ambitious plans, according to the Rector of Gumilyov Eurasian National University:

"This agreement involves the joint efforts of scientists from two universities aimed at implementing research projects and solving tasks in physics.... One of the goals of the project is the development of alternative energy in Kazakhstan."

This objective was amongst many celebrated at Astana EXPO 2017, where the UK Pavilion's theme was 'We are Energy'.



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Right: Kazakh-British Technical University

Top: Haileybury-Almaty School
Left: Cavendish Laboratory (Cambridge University)