

EDUCATION REFORMS IN KAZAKHSTAN

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For Kazakhstan, creating world class human resources through our education and training systems is, if anything, even more fundamental to our future than for many other countries. We are small country, at least in terms of population, sitting literally between giants. If we are going to compete, if we are going to grow and diversify our economy, our scientists, our engineers, our entrepreneurs and our financiers, our public servants, our farmers must all be able to compete with the best. Our workers must be able to adopt ever changing technologies and adapt to rapidly shifting global demands.

President Nazarbayev is committed to ensuring that Kazakhstan citizens have world class skills, training, imagination, and the capacity for critical thinking needed to compete and prosper in the new world order. In the past decade and a half our President has initiated a package of far-reaching and fundamental reforms designed to deliver on this commitment. Taking together these reforms represents nothing less than a re-structuring and modernizing of every aspect of Kazakhstan's education, training and research system, from the bottom up. To achieve Kazakhstan's resource needs, we are modernizing. We are developing a pre-school that insures that children between the ages of 3 to 6 have access to kindergartens that provide organized learning environments using modern pedagogical skills, as well as a primary and secondary school system that prepares Kazakhstan's youth for entry into the world's best universities, so that they can acquire the technical skills needed to meet the needs of Kazakhstan's economy, a vocational and training education system that gives Kazakhstan workers the technical skills they need to compete and succeed, and a university system that produces the leadership and expertise needed to drive Kazakhstan's social and economic development.

The country is also committed to a national researching and development program that puts Kazakhstan's researchers at forefront of efforts to solve the country's and world's most critical programs. This is a daunting reform agenda, and President has wisely approached it through what might be called 'reform by example'. For primary and secondary school reform, he has established the Nazarbayev Intellectual School program that is building trilingual centers of excellence that will attract Kazakhstan's best and brightest students from all parts of the country and all ethnic groups.

To ensure that Kazakhstan workers have skills, employers need, the government has Launched the Kasipkhor Program to redesign and rebuild Kazakhstan's vocational and technical education delivery system. To produce the knowledge needed to drive the country's growth and diversification, Kazakhstan is substantially increasing its research and development expenditures and reforming its research funding mechanisms. These changes will give Kazakhstani researchers the systematic support needed to tackle the most pressing, scientific, engineering, economic and social challenges the country faces, and to collaborate with the world's best researchers and research institutes.

But generating knowledge is not enough. Entrepreneurs, business leaders, financiers and Kazakhstan's workers must be able to take this knowledge and transform it into economic growth and prosperity for all. And so Astana is being developed as an innovation and intellectual cluster that will provide innovators and entrepreneurs the support needed to turn ideas into products. At the center of these reform efforts are Kazakhstan's universities.

Kazakhstan has ambitious plans for its future. It is our universities that must produce the graduates who will create that future. Kazakhstan universities graduates must not only demonstrate the best technical skills and capacity to use those skills creatively in ever changing economic times, but also personify the values of our country.

Why did we create Nazarbayev University some two years ago? As a national project reflecting president's Nazarbayev legacy, Nazarbayev University is in the vanguard of the country's efforts to put university system on a global footing. Nazarbayev University, with its integrated teaching and researching and design activities and unique partnership model will become a template for the development of other Kazakhstani universities. The law that established NU is fundamental to its success. This law gives NU autonomy and academic freedom, a clear system of accountability and control, and perhaps most important, an independent governance system based on the Board of Trustees that makes key decisions on all important university issues. This is standard fare for most established university systems, but new to ours. A second element of the NU success is its unique partnership model. NU is now working with nearly a dozen of the world's leading universities and research institutions to establish and grow its schools and research centers. Together NU and its partners are creating an institution of higher education that is global in quality and rich in character, like Kazakhstan itself.

NU as we can all see is up and running. In its third academic year it will have close to 1500 students selected through a tough merit based transparent competition. It has three schools now entering their second year of operation and more than 160 highly qualified international faculty. Close to 150 alumni of our Bolashak program are working at NU. In the coming year the first three graduate schools will be launched, offering programs in education, business and public policy.

NU will also develop the first academic healthcare system in Kazakhstan, which integrates clinical services, research and teaching. The first two components already exist in the form of the hospitals under national medical holding and NU Center for Life Sciences, and a medical school to be established in the near future will compliment this system. NU's medical program will do for Kazakhstan's health system what NU is doing for its educational system; provide a model for reforms for the rest of the country.

To support the country's innovation needs, President Nazarbayev has tasked NU with the creating the Astana innovation and intellectual cluster, as I mentioned earlier. It will serve to translate knowledge into concepts and commodities that will generate production and growth that will diversify our economic base, create jobs and improve lives. The Astana Innovation and Intellectual Cluster is a bold and ambitious idea that will play an important role in establishing NU as a global research university. For higher education NU is the laboratory that will give the government input into the reform of existing universities and into future efforts to create new institutions of higher learning. This role puts a special obligation and burden on NU. As the university establishes itself as highly quality teaching and research institution it must ensure that the lessons gained from its development are available throughout Kazakhstan's higher education system. Even in this early days lessons are emerging that will change the way are the Kazakhstan universities operate. NU is amplifying and enhancing its dissemination role through aggressive programs of workshops, task forces and conferences. This forum is an example of these efforts. Through the Forum, NU and the Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools will share their experiences with others in Kazakhstan and from around the world. The forum gives NU an opportunity both to teach and to learn, an essential two way street for any educational institution. On behalf of my country and my President, I thank you if you joining us today and wish you very success in the days to come.