

ASSESSMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

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KEY FINDINGS

- While confronting multiple challenges, the higher education system in the Kyrgyz Republic has shown resilience and expanded to enroll more than 50% of the relevant age cohort. Enrolling more than 230,000 students is a tremendous accomplishment.
- Several dedicated professionals, including key members of Parliament, are leading reform efforts in higher education governance, autonomy, and quality assurance.
- University leadership is trying to keep abreast of the latest developments in university affairs and is making efforts, with limited resources, to modernize these institutions.
- A vibrant private sector in higher education in the Kyrgyz Republic is playing a leadership role in the provision of innovative, high-quality academic programs.
- At \$400 per student per year, the level of government funding of the Kyrgyz public higher education system is very low.
- The weaknesses in the 11-year school system have a significant impact on the ability of the higher education system to produce world-class graduates.
- The secondary technical and vocational education sector represents an opportunity for many higher education institutions to align their education programs with the immediate needs of the labor market.
- Very low research output indicates a critical need to develop the entire research ecosystem in universities.
- It is important to create effective measures to track distance education performance, for which appropriate technological tools must be deployed.
- To ensure the credibility of a Kyrgyz education degree, effective and immediate steps must be taken to address the issue of academic corruption.
- The low quality of higher education offered, lack of focus on student learning outcomes, and weak linkage of higher education to labor requirements are areas of concern.
- To compete at the international level, improvements in faculty must be brought to the center of all higher education development efforts.
- With the Soviet-trained scientists, academics, and higher education professionals nearing retirement, urgent steps to reform higher education are required.
- Due to limited capacity in existing institutions, without the support of a large and knowledgeable implementation unit to support the government, higher education reform will not be feasible.

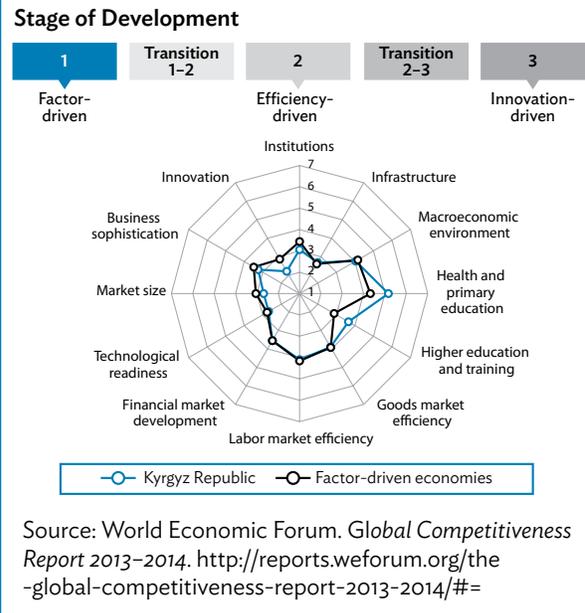
BACKGROUND

The Kyrgyz Republic is a small, mountainous, landlocked nation at the northern arm of the Himalayan range. Significant climatic differences exist between the lush valleys, plateaus, and mountains, resulting in the land being primarily suitable for herding. Kyrgyzstan became part of the Soviet Union in 1924, and the Republic of Kyrgyzstan proclaimed its independence on 31 August 1991, becoming the Kyrgyz Republic in 1993. At the time of independence, more than 60% of the population was employed by collective farms oriented to produce for the Soviet Union. The industry sector, accounting for more than 30% of gross domestic product (GDP), was also serving the Soviet industrial complex.¹

After independence, the government chose the path of radical reform that resulted in skyrocketing inflation and initial social upheaval.² Over the years, there have been periods of economic stagnation and even decline, with migration playing a key stabilizing role, and remittances currently constitute nearly one-third of GDP. GDP growth of the Kyrgyz Republic in 2013 rebounded to 10.5% over the \$6.6 billion GDP in 2012, from a decline of 0.9% in 2011.³ Services (51.1%), industry (28.8%), and agriculture (20%) constituted the largest sectors of the economy. The economy is factor-driven with low-cost labor and unprocessed natural resources, of which gold is the leading commodity.⁴

The country's Human Development Index value is 0.622, equal to its neighbor, Tajikistan, placing it in the medium human development category.⁵ As shown in Figure 1, high attainments in education and health are offset by low per capita income. The country ranked 70 out of 185 in the cost of doing business for 2013, with four factors (starting a business, registering property, getting credit, and protecting investors) each ranked among the top 15.⁶

Figure 1: Competitiveness Profile of the Kyrgyz Republic



During the Soviet era, the population was evenly balanced among Kyrgyzs, Russians, and Uzbeks. Kyrgyz people now constitute nearly 70% of the population, while Russians and Uzbeks constitute about 14% each of the total population. The departure of a significant number of Russian-speaking inhabitants has had a significant impact on education and higher education in the Kyrgyz Republic, which is officially a bilingual country with Kyrgyz, a Turkic-origin language, and Russian defined as the two official languages.

¹ R. Abazov. 1999. Policy of Economic Transition in Kyrgyzstan. *Central Asian Survey*. 18 (2). pp. 197–223.

² IMF, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. 1990. *The Economy of the USSR: A Study Undertaken in Response to a Request by the Houston Summit*. Washington, DC. p. 18.

³ ADB. 2013. *Asian Development Outlook*. Manila.

⁴ World Economic Forum. *Global Competitiveness Report 2013–2014*. <http://reports.weforum.org/the-global-competitiveness-report-2013-2014/#>

⁵ United Nations Development Programme. 2014. *Human Development Report 2013*. New York.

⁶ International Finance Corporation and World Bank. 2013. *Doing Business 2013*. Washington, DC.

The population of the Kyrgyz Republic was estimated at 5.66 million in 2013, with a growth rate of 1.2%.⁷ As per the 2009 census, the population stood at 5.36 million, growing at an average rate of 1.1% per year over 2005–2009. High fertility rates coupled with a young population are projected to continue to enhance the share of the working-age population, which was 57.8% in 2005 and 61.0% in 2012.⁸ A majority of the population is under age 24 years, and the demographic dividend for the country is expected to last until about 2050.⁹

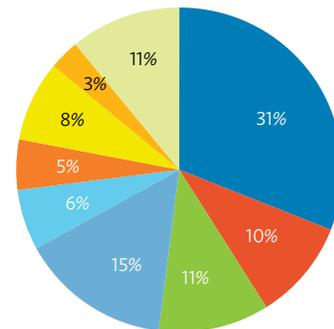
An important legacy of the Soviet system is the strong leadership role played by women in the higher education system of the Kyrgyz Republic. Enrollment of women in higher education stands at 55%, with women in senior management. The Kyrgyz Republic has a Gender Inequality Index value of 0.357, ranking it 64 out of 148 countries in 2012.¹⁰ High enrollment of women in higher education has translated into good representation at the middle leadership level in higher education institutions; however, rector-level appointments of female academicians remain elusive.

Agriculture is the largest employment sector, where work is primarily of a seasonal nature.¹¹ Industry, trade, and construction are the other major employment sectors (Figure 2). Excess labor, which is currently the main feature of the labor market of the Kyrgyz Republic, is primarily absorbed by the large markets of Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation. A review of qualifications of the labor force shows that 16% of workers have had some exposure to higher education.

The government recognizes that “the quality of education is one of the most reliable indicators of the future development of any nation,” and that “the economy is the principal driver of sovereignty and national security.”¹² The government’s action plan focuses on four key areas in education: (i) aligning higher education with the labor market through “changes in the structure of higher education training

Figure 2: Employment by Sector in the Kyrgyz Republic

Employment by Sector



Source: Analytical Report on the Activities of the Ministry of Youth, Labour and Employment of the Kyrgyz Republic for the Year 2012. 2013. Bishkek. Unpublished.

based on analysis of country priorities and economic region’s strategies”; (ii) meeting the Bologna Process requirement for the education structure to transition to a three-tier (bachelor’s, master’s, and PhD) system through implementation of a regulatory framework, training of human resources, and focus on learning outcomes during development of the educational curriculum; (iii) developing quality assurance system meeting European quality standards, which requires an optimum regulatory framework for quality assurance of higher education; and (iv) improving teaching quality in institutions of higher learning through involvement of employers, in-service teacher training, and improved qualification requirements for university faculty.¹³

⁷ ADB. 2014. *Asian Development Bank and Kyrgyz Republic: Fact Sheet*. Manila.

⁸ Analytical Report on the Activities of the Ministry of Youth, Labour and Employment of the Kyrgyz Republic for the Year 2012. 2013. Bishkek. Unpublished.

⁹ UN Population Division. *Probabilistic Projections: Total Dependency Ratio*. http://esa.un.org/unpd/ppp/Figures-Output/Population/PPP_Total-Dependency-Ratio.htm

¹⁰ UNDP. 2013. *Human Development Report: Kyrgyzstan*. <http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/Country-Profiles/KGZ.pdf>

¹¹ See footnote 8.

¹² Government of the Kyrgyz Republic. *National Sustainable Development Strategy (2013–2017)*. <http://donors.kg/en/strategy/172-national-sustainable-development-strategy-2013-2017>

¹³ Government of the Kyrgyz Republic. 2012. *Educational Development Strategy 2020 Action Plan*. Bishkek.

The historic focus on education resulted in universal enrollment at the primary and secondary levels. However, the low scores obtained in the 2006 and 2009 Program for International Student Assessment of 15-year-old students highlighted serious issues with the quality of school education.¹⁴ The national assessment of student education achievement tests conducted by the Center for Education Assessment and Teaching Methods and taken by a sample of students annually reveals a pattern of decline of the standard of education in the country.¹⁵ The government is taking several steps to address the issues identified, including a doubling of teacher salaries, a decrease in the number of learning hours for students, improved curriculum, infrastructure renovation, and improved supply of textbooks and learning materials to schools.

The 2006 education strategy originally called for extending the school system from an 11- to a 12-year system; however, considering the costs involved, it was decided to gradually move toward this objective by enhancing school hours at the preschool level. Thus, preschool education has been significantly increased to help add a complete school year.

Following completion of 9 years of schooling, a child may choose to either follow the technical and vocational education stream or the 2-year higher secondary regular stream. Most people prefer the second option since they can then directly enter higher education institutions upon completion of 11 years of schooling.

¹⁴ OECD. 2010. *Reviews of National Policies for Education: Kyrgyz Republic 2010: Lessons from Program for International Student Assessment*. Paris. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264088757-en>

¹⁵ Center for Education Assessment and Teaching Methods. *National Assessment of Student Educational Achievements in Kyrgyzstan*. <http://www.testing.kg/en/projects/nsba1/>

HIGHER EDUCATION

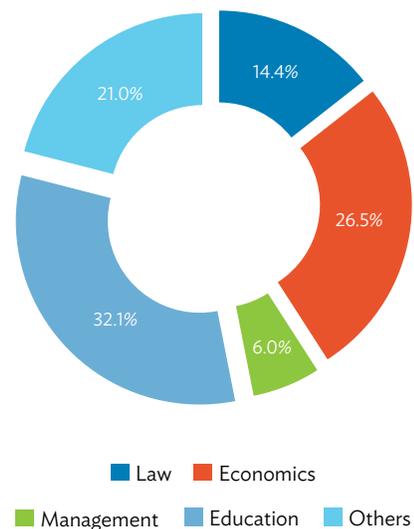
At independence, there were nine public universities in the country enrolling nearly 55,000 students, and all students enjoyed equal rights to education in all universities of the Soviet Union. Since 1991, the growth of universities in the Kyrgyz Republic has been rapid, and there are currently 54 universities in the country (including 21 private universities) enrolling 51.1% of the age cohort. Although large in number, private universities enroll only 27,500 (12.5%) of students.¹⁶ The state-funded institutions are governed by the Ministry of Education and Science, which defines policy and determines standards of program delivery that cover issues such as curriculum to be taught, contact hours, and modes of examination. Specialized universities in health, diplomacy, and management are also governed by the respective line ministries. For all public universities except national universities, the ministry also appoints the rectors of the universities following a secret ballot of the faculty. Rectors of national universities are appointed by the President.

Admission to Kyrgyz universities and award of government scholarship seats are through a national test (ORT) conducted by the independent Center for Educational Assessment and Testing.¹⁷ More than 55,000 students took the test in 2013 when it was made mandatory. Of the 5,705 scholarship or “contract” seats in universities, 4,593 were awarded on the basis of the ORT, with the remaining awarded based on quota, excellent performance, and government priorities. More than 50% of the scholarship slots are provided to students enrolling to become teachers. At least three observations can be drawn based on an analysis of ORT test results: (i) students from developed regions of the country perform much better than those who studied in less developed regions; (ii) on average, students taking the test in Russian perform better (by more than 20%) than those taking it in Uzbek who, in turn, outperform (by more than 5%) those taking the test in Kyrgyz; and (iii) students of schools having Russian as a language of instruction perform significantly better than those studying in schools where Kyrgyz is the medium of instruction.

As a consequence of the government’s policy of discouraging enrollment in distance and part-time education, the total number of students enrolled in higher education has decreased over the past 3 years from 250,000 students in 2008 to 231,500 in 2012. The government in 2012 stopped enrollment into correspondence-type distance learning programs, where 43% of higher education students were enrolled at that time. The distance education mode of study is being introduced to replace correspondence programs, and requisite legislation is being finalized for this.

Most students (77%) are enrolled in the humanities and social sciences, with 73% of them enrolled in law, economics, and education (Figure 3). Of those enrolled in technical fields, 66% are enrolled in various disciplines of technology (primarily engineering fields) while 34% are enrolled in different fields of science (Figure 4).

Figure 3: Student Enrollment in Humanities and Social Sciences

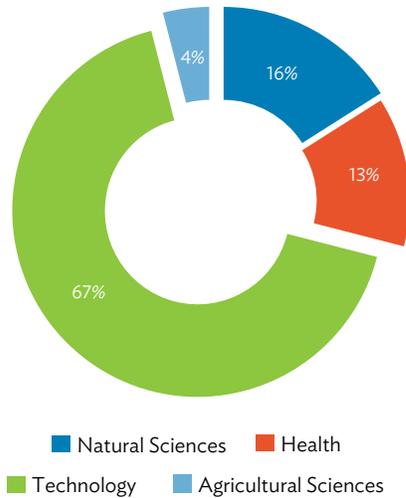


Source: ADB. 2011. *Diagnostic Assessment of Higher Education*. Consultant’s report. Manila.

¹⁶ Higher education data downloaded from Kyrgyz Statistical Agency. <http://www.stat.kg>

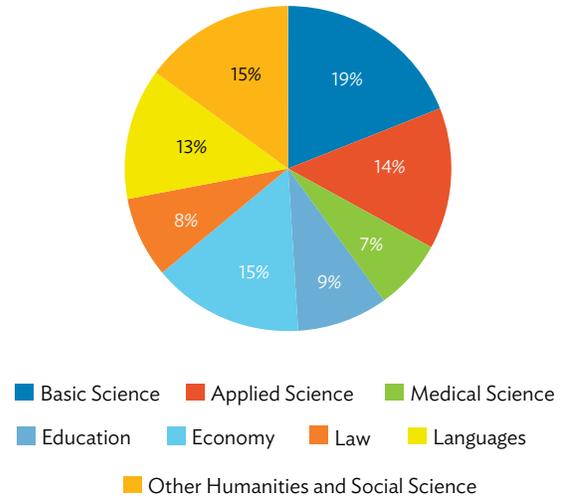
¹⁷ Obshchepublikansky testing (ORT). <http://www.testing.kg>

Figure 4: Student Enrollment in Technical Fields



Source: ADB. 2011. *Diagnostic Assessment of Higher Education*. Consultant's report. Manila.

Figure 5: Postgraduate Students by Field of Study



Source: UNICEF. 2011. *Education and Science in the Kyrgyz Republic, Statistical Bulletin 2011*. New York.

Research, Science, and Innovation Systems

When the Kyrgyz Republic gained independence, it inherited the Soviet tradition of research institutions operating under the domain of the Academy of Sciences and separate from the institutions of higher learning.¹⁸ The out-migration of scientists from research institutes to the Russian Federation following independence severely affected the research base of the country, from which it is still recovering. Only 20% of the faculty currently hold the rank of associate or full professor, with an average age close to 55 years, clearly an issue of concern.¹⁹

About 800 students are admitted to postgraduate studies each year, of which the vast majority (90%) are admitted into the higher education institutions. Women now constitute the majority (61%) of these students.²⁰ The number of Candidate of Science applicants showed an increase of about 12% over 5 years, rising to more than 1,100 applicants in 2010; however, the number of people defending their theses

has remained essentially constant at 160 per year.²¹ The number of new students admitted to doctoral programs in higher education institutions showed a healthy increase of nearly 70% over 2006–2010, rising to 27 students in 2010. The total number of doctoral students in these institutions also continued to increase, from 61 in 2010 to 93 in 2011. Only a small fraction of doctoral scholars are associated with the scientific and technical fields, however, and it is clear that the size and composition of the postgraduate education system would have to be considerably improved to allow the Kyrgyz Republic to move toward a knowledge economy.

Regarding international journal publications, the Kyrgyz Republic ranks 144 out of 231 territories ranked by the Scopus tool SCImago.²² During 2012, only 104 international journal publications were listed for the Kyrgyz Republic, which, despite being 25% higher than the 80 listed in 2011, is still a very low number overall (Figure 6).

¹⁸ J. Brunner, and A. Tillett. n.d. *Higher Education in Central Asia: The Challenges of Modernization. Case Studies from Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Uzbekistan*. Washington, DC: International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and World Bank.

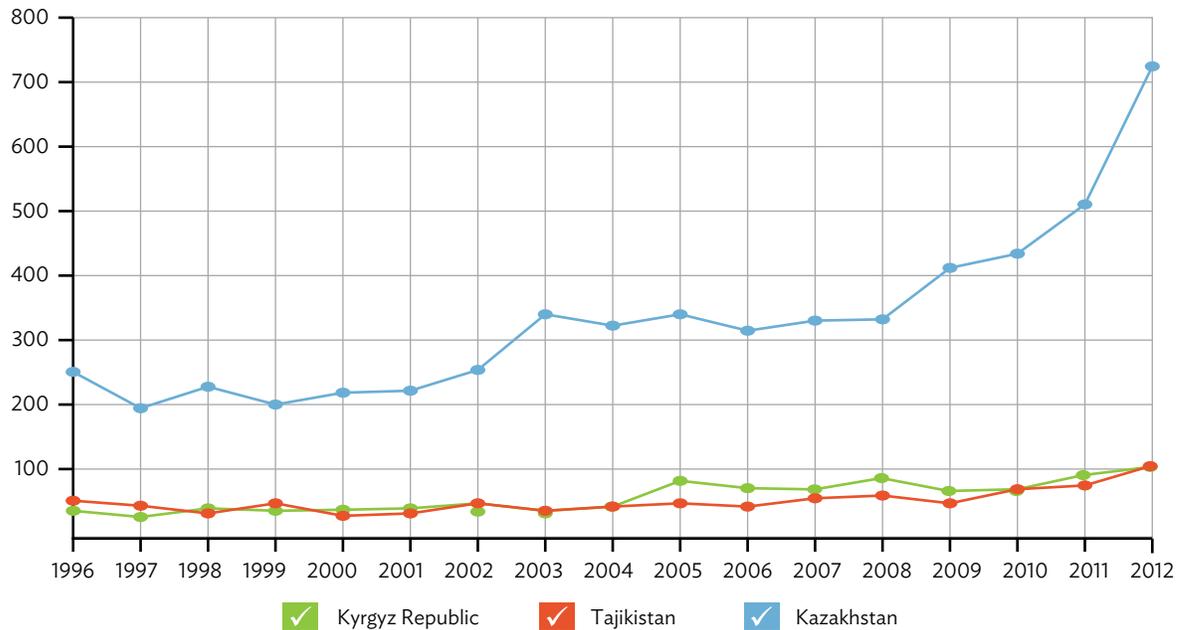
¹⁹ Refers to the faculty of the Technological University of Kyrgyzstan, which has 22,000 students.

²⁰ UNICEF. 2011. *Education and Science in the Kyrgyz Republic, Statistical Bulletin 2011*. New York.

²¹ Candidate of Science is equivalent to a PhD.

²² Scopus is a multidisciplinary navigational tool that contains records going back to the mid-1960s, offering newly linked citations across a body of scientific abstracts. SCImago Journal & Country Rankings. <http://www.scimagojr.com/>

Figure 6: Comparison of Research Output from the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan Using the SCOPUS Database



Source: SCImago Journal and Country Rank. <http://www.scimagojr.com/>

The total expenditure on scientific research and development in 2010 was Som344.5 million, of which more than 75% was for payroll-related expenses, leaving about Som75 million (less than \$2 million) for equipment, supplies, and related expenses. For 2013, 92% of the total budget of the Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences was for payroll-related expenses.²³ A positive development in research has been the launch of the Central Asian Research and Education Network, allowing the Kyrgyz Republic to connect with researchers in neighboring countries.²⁴

Quality Assurance

The Kyrgyz Republic is aspiring to join the European Higher Education Area, for which steps are being taken to implement the Bologna Process three-cycle academic system.²⁵ As a first stage, the two-cycle bachelor's/master's program has been adopted,

and pilot implementation was initiated more than 5 years ago. In 2012, all university entrants at the undergraduate level enrolled in 4-year bachelor's degree programs only, with the exception of medicine, law, and a few select disciplines such as music, in which international norms allow for longer first-cycle programs. Discussion has been initiated on the adoption of the third cycle, as has already been done by Kazakhstan. Five universities were authorized in 2013 to pilot PhD programs with foreign collaboration to ensure high-quality standards.

Together with the structure of degrees, European Standard Guidelines-compatible quality assurance systems of a country are prerequisites to joining the European Higher Education Area.²⁶ On 4 July 2013, an amendment to the Law on Education was passed with four key concepts: (i) introduction of an independent accreditation agency, (ii) a system of

²³ UNESCO. 2011. *Education and Science in the Kyrgyz Republic, Statistical Bulletin 2011*. Paris. Table 14.3

²⁴ Central Asian Research and Education Network. <http://caren.dante.net/Pages/home.aspx>

²⁵ European Higher Education Area. <http://www.ehea.info/>

²⁶ European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance. <http://www.enqa.eu/index.php/home/esg/>

recognition of independent accreditation agencies, (iii) an institutional accreditation procedure, and (iv) a program accreditation procedure. These developments will allow the country to move from input indicator-based licensing systems of quality assurance to output- and outcome-based internationally compatible systems for which necessary capacity has been developed as a result of the Tempus project and the EdNet project.^{27,28} It is expected that over the next few years, based on the results of the accreditation process, the number of public universities will be reduced to 18. Of these, a few will be declared national universities authorized to undertake PhD research programs, while the remainder will remain essentially undergraduate institutions.²⁹

To enhance the quality of higher education and to increase the number of employed graduates to 80%, the government is reviewing mechanisms to ensure close collaboration with employers through the signing of contracts between academic institutions and regional employers. Academic institutions will also be required to provide education in subjects that match the profile of the university. It is expected that these efforts will encourage mergers as well as closures of certain universities.

Financing of Higher Education

Although government financing of education has doubled over the past 3 years, higher education receives only a small percentage of these funds. In 2012, the government allocated Som1 billion to higher education, or around 4.9% of the total education budget, which represented an improvement from the 3.5% allocated in 2008. However, it is well short of the 25%–33% allocations in most Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries. Low allocation of funds to higher education, with a

substantial proportion used for recurring expenditure, results in minimized expenditure on research; lack of scientific equipment; and low salaries for faculty, who are forced to teach at multiple locations to cover basic expenses.

On a per capita basis, the average level of government funding per regular student is about \$112 per year. This low figure starkly illustrates the financial situation faced by public-funded institutions, which must compete with universities such as the Turkish-Manas University (KTU-Manas), jointly funded by the governments of the Kyrgyz Republic and Turkey, and the privately funded American University of Central Asia (AUCA), both of which spend in excess of \$5,000 per student per year. It is a testimony to the ingenuity of public institutions that they raise nearly 90% of their budgets themselves to provide reasonable quality education.

Some of the best institutions of higher learning in the Kyrgyz Republic are in the private sector, including the AUCA and the Organization for Security and Cooperation (OSCE) in Europe Academy. Tuition fees are around \$5,000. In most cases, however, tuition fees in private universities contribute to about 30% of their operating budgets, with the balance being raised from donors, endowment funds, and foreign governments.

An upcoming innovation will be the privatization of the management of select universities, with some no longer receiving government support, while the government will retain ownership of the land and building assets. The government has also indicated that funding for the universities that remain will be significantly enhanced. These are positive developments that will, if implemented, serve to significantly improve the quality of higher education.

²⁷ Tempus is the European Union program that supports the modernization of higher education in partner countries. Tempus. <http://www.tempus.kg/index.htm>

²⁸ Education Network Association. <http://www.ednet.edu.kg/>

²⁹ Interview with Kanat Sadykov, minister for education of the Kyrgyz Republic, given on 12 May 2013, available at <http://www.akipress.kg>



SUPPORT TO KYRGYZ HIGHER EDUCATION FROM DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

A number of bilateral and multilateral development partners support the higher education sector in the Kyrgyz Republic, broadly in line with the Joint Country Support Strategy, which highlights “building sustainable human capital through improved education outcomes” as a key area.³⁰ ADB has approved in 2014 a sector development program to support improved learning outcomes in schools as well as teacher education by the universities. The Aga Khan Development Network is spearheading the establishment of the University of Central Asia (UCA) in Naryn (Kyrgyz Republic), Khorog (Tajikistan), and

Tekeli (Kazakhstan), while the Soros Foundation supports scholarships for study abroad, development of standards and curriculum for improved labor market linkages, and research grants for faculty. The Tempus project, supported by the European Union, is a significant driver of reform in the higher education sector, helping align the Kyrgyz higher education sector with Bologna Process requirements and supporting a higher education reform group to develop indigenous solutions for the improvement of governance and management of higher education in the country.

³⁰ World Bank. 2007. *Joint Country Support Strategy of the Kyrgyz Republic*. http://www.aideffectiveness.org/media/k2/attachments/JCSS_ENG_07_1.pdf

QUALITY AND COVERAGE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

AUCA was established in 1993 to assist with the democratic transition of the Kyrgyz Republic through the development of an academic program committed to “freedom of expression, critical inquiry and academic honesty.” A preparatory year to assist students in gaining entry is also offered by the university. The AUCA undergraduate program, taught only in English, is based on the tradition of small liberal arts colleges of the United States and requires a bachelor’s thesis and a 54 credit-hour “core” general education program with courses in writing, critical thinking, math and science, arts, and sports. AUCA offers a “double” undergraduate degree with Bard University, which is accredited in the United States. A new 16,000-square meter campus in Bishkek will allow it to increase enrollment from the current 1,100 to nearly 1,500 students while also being environmentally sustainable, with heating coming from geothermal sources available in Bishkek.



Artist's rendition of new American University of Central Asia campus

UCA, with a charter to establish three campuses in the Kyrgyz Republic, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan, is an institution with the objective of having the environment of a small United States liberal arts college along with the dynamism of a research university.³¹ In Bishkek, UCA is currently housed in temporary facilities and has not initiated any academic program. However, the establishment of the Institute of Public Policy and the Mountain Studies Research Center, together with the Aga Khan Humanities Project, have begun to establish the credentials of UCA.

Starting as the Women’s Pedagogical Institute, **Arabaev University** is the premier pedagogical institution in the country and one of the oldest universities in the Kyrgyz Republic. It has six educational campuses in the center of Bishkek, along with 10 institutes, carrying out activities in 59 specialties of higher education. With a focus on teacher education, Arabaev University has been at the forefront of educational reform in the country, switching completely to Bologna Process-compliant bachelor’s and master’s programs in 2011. The university is now focusing on the master’s level, enrolling more than 600 students in various specializations of teacher education. It recognizes the need to build a strong postgraduate program to be recognized as a premier university and is hoping to initiate PhD-level programs soon. Following closure of distance education programs, which at their peak enrolled more than 12,000 students, the university has embarked on a program to utilize instructional technology tools to support the coverage of teacher education. However, a system for practical exposure of students to classroom teaching in schools remains a challenge.

Already considered among the top technical universities during Soviet times, the **Kyrgyz State University of Construction, Transport and Architecture** has continued this tradition. With annual support of only Som20 million (\$0.43 million) from the Ministry of Education and Science in 2011, it is a testimony to the ingenuity of the university to have grown to more than 15,000 students and to have become one of the country’s leading technical universities, with joint degree programs and large partnership programs with Austria, France, Germany, India, Saudi Arabia, Sweden, and the United States. A shortage of laboratories is the biggest hurdle to progress. Acutely aware of the requirements of modern higher education institutions to promote innovation and entrepreneurship, the university runs business plan competitions and has a career and marketing center for placement of its graduates.

³¹ UCA. Academic Programmes. <http://www.ucentralasia.org/programmes.asp>



KTU-Manas started operating in 1997 following the 1995 declaration of the Kyrgyz Republic and Turkey to jointly establish a university. Land and building for the university was provided by the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic while operational costs are provided by the Government of Turkey. Today, KTU-Manas has a student body of 4,200 and a faculty of 537. A new campus under construction on the outskirts of Bishkek will allow KTU-Manas to expand enrollment to 10,000 by 2015. All three cycles of the Bologna Process system are fully implemented in the university, although the third-cycle PhD program is not yet recognized by the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic. KTU-Manas complies with both Turkish and Kyrgyz standards of education. The faculty is primarily provided by Turkey, and all faculty members are expected to engage in research, write proposals, and publish in impact-factor journals. KTU-Manas charges no tuition fees from students, with all expenses (estimated to be \$2,500–\$9,000 per student depending on area and level) covered by the Government of Turkey.

Although **Naryn State University's** primary focus was teacher training, the university has now expanded to offer programs in electrical engineering, transport engineering, information technology, mathematics, social and political sciences, foreign languages, agriculture, and other programs. The university has 425 staff members, including 137 faculty members. Of these, 6 hold doctoral degrees, while 42 have a Candidate of Science status. The university has both undergraduate and postgraduate programs. It receives minimal funding from the government and, due to its location in Naryn, is unable to attract many contract students, leaving it perpetually short of requisite funds.

Established in 1954 and located in the heart of Bishkek, the **Kyrgyz Economic University** comprises three faculties and institutes with primary program offerings in economics, accountancy, finance, and management. It also has formal programs targeting the service industries: hotels, restaurants, and tourism. Although the university is a public institution, it opted to become self-funded in FY2013, which relieved it of a 20% tax on income generated, as it no longer receives financial support from the government. This option has provided the university with significantly enhanced space for decision making, allowing it to respond to market demand more quickly. The university has been a pioneer since 2003 in the implementation of bachelor's and master's education programs in line with the Bologna Process requirements and has also initiated a PhD program with the assistance of the Tempus project.

Opened in 1939 with 200 students, the **Kyrgyz State Medical Academy** has since grown to its present enrollment of nearly 5,200 students in six faculties. General medicine is by far the largest program, attracting foreign students from nearly 20 countries. The absence of a university hospital represents one of the biggest challenges faced by the university, which must enter into arrangements with local hospitals for access to clinical facilities and patients. Government funding provides 25%–30% of university requirements, and the university must supplement its finances through income from contract and foreign students. Graduates of the medical university are eligible to practice medicine in the Commonwealth of Independent States—Belarus, Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, and others. Due to inadequate funding, the university is not in a position to engage in serious research, although it does have sufficiently qualified faculty members to do so.

The **Kyrgyz State Technical University** lays claim to having been at the forefront of creation of all other technical institutions in the country. It comprises 7 departments, 10 institutes, and 4 research institutes, all conducting bachelor's, master's, and doctoral programs in accordance with requirements of the Bologna Process. It is a large university, with more than 12,000 students at the main campus. About 90% of the full-time students enrolled on campus are in the technical fields. The university finds the student quality declining, especially in mathematics and physics, and therefore must conduct remedial courses to help them. Only 15% of the students are on state-funded grant seats, while the majority (85%) are

contract students. Only 25% of the university budget comes from government support, and the university is critically dependent on contract students, which it must enroll in large numbers to remain financially viable.

On 30 May 2013, the **Kyrgyz National University**, the “mother” university in the country, celebrated its 80th anniversary. Enrolling more than 32,000 students in 14 faculties, it is clearly the largest university in the country. Concerned about the future when the current group of highly qualified senior faculty members retire, the university is now seeking substantially enhanced financial support to continue as the nation’s premier university. Without funds and incentives for research work, and without the ability to send future faculty members abroad for higher studies, the university faces an uncertain future. Recent government efforts to focus on quality, reduce the number of universities, and significantly enhance

funding for national centers of academic and research excellence bodes well for the university since it is poised to be one of the universities that will receive enhanced support.

The **OSCE in Europe Academy** in Bishkek is a public foundation designed to promote the principles and aims of the OSCE in Central Asia, enshrined in its fundamental idea of comprehensive security. Both of the two master’s programs (politics and security, and economic governance and development) are offered in English with full financial support, making the programs extremely attractive. More than 500 students apply for just 50 open positions. Weak theoretical foundations of the students and a deficiency in English writing skills do pose a problem. High-quality faculty, with support from the international community, allow the academy to deliver cost-effective, international quality postgraduate education.

Assessment of Higher Education

Kyrgyz Republic

While confronting multiple challenges, the higher education system in the Kyrgyz Republic has shown resilience and expanded to enroll more than 50% of the relevant age cohort. But the national assessment of student education achievement tests reveals a pattern of decline of the standard of education. Several dedicated professionals, including key members of Parliament, are leading reform efforts in higher education governance, autonomy, and quality assurance.

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