



Looking at Kazakhstan's Higher Education Landscape: From Transition to Transformation Between 1920 and 2015

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In the past 25 years, Kazakhstan has undergone a period of rapid education reform. As it began transitioning from a Soviet Republic to an independent nation-state, President Nursultan Nazarbayev and the Kazakhstani government made it clear that the lynchpin to becoming a globally competitive market economy was education (Aitzhanova et al. 2014). Ideologically, this focus signified a watershed moment, as the philosophical underpinnings of Soviet higher education (HE) were uprooted, with the transition toward a market economy. However, this process of reforming Kazakhstan's HE system is situated amidst significant demographic, socio-cultural and political shifts which have taken place in the last two decades.

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Subsequently, while the path to education reform shares similarities to that of other states of the former Soviet Union (FSU), there are idiosyncrasies particular to the Kazakhstani context.

Starting with the establishment of its first HE institutions (HEI), this chapter provides a brief historical overview of HE in Kazakhstan starting from the Soviet period. The next section examines the education reforms that have been implemented since 1991 by examining three aspects of system transformation that the contributions in this edited volume are focusing on—horizontal diversification, vertical differentiation and inter-organisational relationships (Teichler 1988). Drawing from various sources, such as archival Soviet documents, Kazakhstani MoES reports and policy papers, along with interviews with different Kazakhstani administrators and faculty members, we found that at the macro-level there have, in fact, been departures from the Soviet HE apparatus vis-à-vis regulatory reform. However, despite this, much change remains to be implemented in terms of institutional, pedagogical and research practices in order to fulfil the teaching, learning and research mission of HE. The chapter concludes with a discussion on ongoing and emerging challenges facing the Kazakhstani HE system, as well examining its Soviet HE legacy.

THE FOUNDATIONS: KAZAKHSTAN'S SOVIET HIGHER EDUCATION LEGACY

The Soviet education apparatus began developing HE in the Kazakh SSR as part of its overall massification of education project in the 1920s and the emphasis on preparing local specialists during the *korenizatsia* period. Prior to this time, no HEIs existed in the territory of present-day Kazakhstan (Froumin et al. 2014; Kzykeyeva and Oskolkova 2011). During the first phase of HE development starting in the 1920s, five institutions were established—Bukeev, Semipalatinsk, Kazakh, Orenberg Institutes of Public Education and the Kazakh Institute of Education in Alma-Ata (Dzholdasbekov and Kuznetsov 1975). Between 1927 and 1932, 15 more HEIs were established, expanding the focus to include medicine, agriculture and livestock, such as the Veterinary-Zoo Technical Institute (1928), Kazakh State Agricultural Institute (1930) and the Kazakh Medical Institute (1931).

The following 5-year period (1933–37) saw an expansion of pedagogical institutes throughout the Kazakh SSR, including the establishment of

Kirov Kazakh State University (1934), as well as the inclusion of post-graduate (*aspirantura*) studies in different institutes (Dzholdasbekov and Kuznetsov 1975). Following World War II (1946–63), 16 more institutes were established in the Kazakh SSR, along with the Kazakh Academy of Sciences.¹ In 1959, a state-level committee was formed to centralise the HE management within the Kazakh SSR, which would then eventually become the Kazakhstani MoES (Kyzykeyeva and Oskolkova 2011). By 1975, there were 47 HEIs, which offered programmes in 175 different areas for 200,000 students (Dzholdasbekov and Kuznetsov 1975).²

However, not only was the HE system undergoing transition during that time, but that was situated in the broader context of education reform. One of the early challenges facing HE was a bottleneck effect; because of limited access to quality primary and secondary education, access to HE was consequently limited. Moreover, as Kyzykeyeva and Oskolkova (2011) note, students' education trajectories were also affected by the rupturing of communities in the 1930s as a result of Stalin's social engineering strategy. Additionally, because HEIs expanded so rapidly between 1928 and 1975, they faced a number of pragmatic challenges including: classroom and student housing shortages, a lack of textbooks and various teaching materials and a shortage of qualified teaching faculty (Heynemann et al. 2007; Rumyantseva 2005; Silova 2011).

Like in the other SSRs, HE in the Kazakh SSR had several aims. The first was to produce specialists who could help sustain the Soviet Union's objectives, including education goals like universal literacy and sociopolitical ones like a commitment to the party ideology. Relatedly, the second aim was to reproduce specialists who would be able to work in industries that were being developed in various territories. For example, in the Kazakh SSR, this included the oil and gas sector (Froumin et al. 2014). In this way, the horizontal landscape of HEIs was an instantiation of these two pillars—ideological and industrial—and they were centrally determined in a command economy.

However, the high degree of specialisation also consequently resulted in resource inefficiency and knowledge compartmentalisation. This knowledge compartmentalisation was seen in the allocation of institutional functions—institutes focused on teaching or conducting applied research, and academies conducted more “pure” scientific research.³

By the end of the Soviet period, the Kazakh SSR had 55 HEIs that enrolled 287,400 students (NIIVO 1992). Table 8.1 provides an overview

Table 8.1 Kazakhstani HEIs (AY1988–89)

<i>HEIs by academic focus</i>	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>Enrolled students</i>
Engineering	12	80,989
Transport	2	7,153
Agriculture	7	40,455
Economy/law	3	18,452
Education	23	104,516
Health, medicine, sport	6	23,477
Arts	2	1,836
Total	55	276,878

Source: Narodnoe Obrazovanie i Kultura v USSR (1989, p. 142, 202)

of the institutional specialisations that were inherited by the nascent Kazakhstani government.

While no official taxonomy is available regarding the types of institutions and the corresponding quantity, Table 8.2 provides a general taxonomy of the types of HEIs that the Kazakhstani MoES inherited.

Al Farabi Kazakh National University (originally Kirov Kazakh State University) is the oldest university in the country and was the only HEI that could be considered a “classical” university with its multiple Faculties and Departments and an enrolment of 12,909 students (1988) (Moskva-Finansy i Statistika Razdel 1989). Most of the other HEIs could be categorised as either regional institutes or specialised institutes that were subject to shared oversight by the MoES and another Ministry (e.g., the Ministry of Transport, Internal Affairs or Defense). Regional institutes were primarily defined by geographical distribution, for example, pedagogical institutes were established throughout the country. This is in contrast to specialised institutes which, as mentioned earlier, were sector-specific—oil and gas, engineering and so on.

In sum, the Soviet HE legacy in the Kazakh SSR included: a system which was fundamentally undergirded by political ideology; isolation from international trends and practices, because of its ideological underpinnings; poor financing, which led to slow innovation; and systemically, the emphasis on specialisations, which were linked to the Soviet’s raw economy (Rudista 2004). However, this legacy also included the network of 55 HEIs, of which the majority were engineering and pedagogy institutes, which provided the nascent Kazakhstani government a point of departure in 1991.

Table 8.2 Types of Kazakhstani HEIs in AY1990–91

<i>HEI type (quantity)</i>	<i>Example</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Affiliation</i>	<i>Research activity</i>
National university (2)	Al Farabi Kazakh National University ^a	Almaty	MoES	Pure
Regional institutes (24)	Kostanay Pedagogical Institute	Kostanay	MoES	Applied research/teaching only
Specialised institutes (29)	Kokshetau Technical Institute of the MoES Kazakhstan ^b	Kokshetau	Ministry of Internal Affairs; MoES	Applied research/teaching only

Note:

^aThe other university in the Kazakh SSR was Karaganda State University as noted earlier. It should be noted that while Karaganda State University did have the status of university, it was smaller in terms of number of faculties and student enrolment in comparison to Al Farabi Kazakh National University.

^bSee http://www.kti-tjm.kz/nash_instityt.html

THE EARLY YEARS: HIGHER EDUCATION REFORM IN THE 1990s

The dissolution of the Soviet Union brought about significant social, political and economic changes in Kazakhstan. Economically, from 1991 to 1996 the country's Gross Domestic Product dropped 39%, resulting in an overall collapse of the country's economy (World Bank 2005). But despite seemingly grim prospects, the economy eventually began recovering around 1999 and by 2007, achieved an annual growth rate of 10% and higher (Pomfret 2014). However, in spite of steady growth, Kazakhstan has not been exempt from the global economic downturn in the 2000s. Unsustainable levels of currency exchange rate control by the Kazakhstani Central Bank, combined with plummeting oil prices and economic sanctions on the Russian Federation starting in 2014, led to the de-dollarisation of Kazakhstan's currency, the tenge, and floated the exchange rate. This resulted in three significant rounds of currency devaluation (2009, 2014 and 2015). Consequently, the inflation forecast for 2016 is now 7.9% with a predicted GDP growth of 3.3% (Asian Development Bank n.d.).

Demographically, as the economy struggled, birth rates declined in the 1990s. This declining birth rate was reversed in the early 2000s, a shift which corresponds to the country's economic recovery and a period of relative sociopolitical stability as seen in Fig. 8.1.

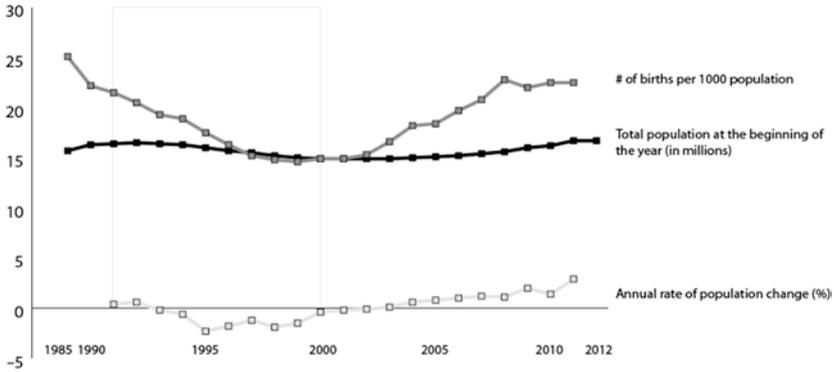


Fig. 8.1 Demographic trends (1985–2012) (Source: Adopted from the Agency of Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2013))

Socioculturally, with the establishment of its new Constitution in 1995, the Kazakhstani government began constructing a new civic identity.⁴ This began by privileging the titular Kazakh language as the official state language, moving toward the conflation of an ethnic Kazakh and Kazakhstani civic identity.⁵ This has resulted in changes in the language of instruction (LOI) in all schools—there was a shift in the LOI at the primary, secondary and tertiary level from Russian toward Kazakh (and more recently, the additional inclusion of English as the LOI).

In the 1990s, the Kazakhstani government began implementing a system-wide education reform amidst wide-scale sociopolitical-cultural reforms. The government’s focus at the time was primarily on creating a regulatory structure that could create the conditions under which education reform could take place. The Constitution (1995) established the right to compulsory education for all Kazakhstani citizens, the Law on Education (1992) and the Law on Higher Education (1993),⁶ along with other regulations and standards (Yakavets 2014). What did not change immediately was who “owned” education—HE remained a state-owned enterprise. Consequently, this meant that the government maintained the all-encompassing centralised control that had existed under the Soviet regime (Sarinzhipov 2013).

Figure 8.2 provides an overview of the main foci of the regulations initiated between 1991 and 2015.

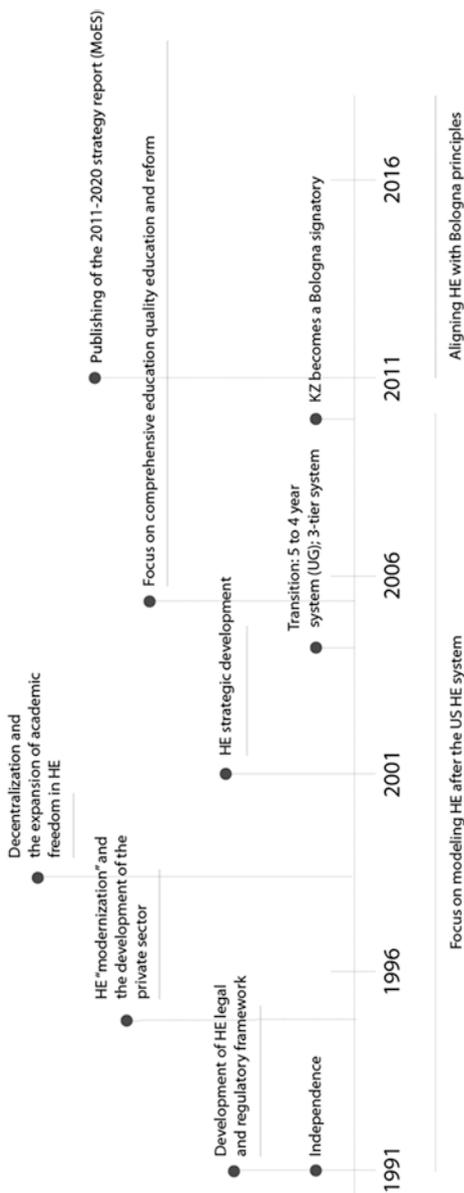


Fig. 8.2 Education reform timeline (1991–2020) (Source: Adopted from OECD (2007, 112))

Although there were a number of departures from the Soviet HE system and orientation in the new legislation and regulations, the most significant was the opening of private HEIs. The 1993 legislation “On Higher Education” permitted private universities to operate in Kazakhstan (albeit under the auspices of all MoES regulations).⁷ During AY1990–91, there were 55 public HEIs. After the 1993 law was passed, 32 more HEIs opened, the majority of which were private (Sulima 2008). By AY1996–97, 43.2% of the HEIs were public and 56.8% were private (OECD 2007)—this distribution stayed similar through AY2013–14 (MoES 2014). The distribution of students enrolled in public and private HEIs was also similar (although there was some fluctuation). For example, in AY2012–13, 49.1% of students were enrolled in public HEIs. By AY2014–15, this percentage shifted, with 48.3% of students enrolled in public HEIs and 50.3% enrolled in private HEIs (MoES 2015). So while the proliferation of private HEIs was initially permitted through the enabling of regulatory reform, as seen in the enrolment distribution, there was a corresponding demand by Kazakhstanis who felt that acquiring a HE degree was essential to being employed in the new economic world order as demonstrated in Fig. 8.3.

Figure 8.3 reveals that the patterns of growth in student enrolment and the number of HEIs are similar. There are upward trends in both graphs with a particular peak in between AY2004–07. However, since then, there has been a decline in both the number of HEIs and enrolment due to increased accountability from the MoES (HEI decline) and demographic decrease (student enrolment). But despite these social and institutional shifts, the opening of HE to the private sector helped absorb the demand for HE particularly in the first 15 years of the Republic.

With an increased HE demand and the establishment of 114 HEIs in the 1990s, it is plausible to expect that geographical access to HE would have increased. This, however, did not happen. During the Soviet period, HEIs were primarily located in major urban areas (e.g., Almaty, previously Alma-Ata) or in oblasts with particular raw material factories (e.g., East Kazakhstan). However, when looking at the distribution of HEIs in the 1990s, the majority were established in Almaty city because it was previously the capital of the Kazakh SSR and for the first few years of independent Kazakhstan. Figure 8.4 shows that although Almaty is no longer the capital, it still has the highest proportion of HEIs in the country.

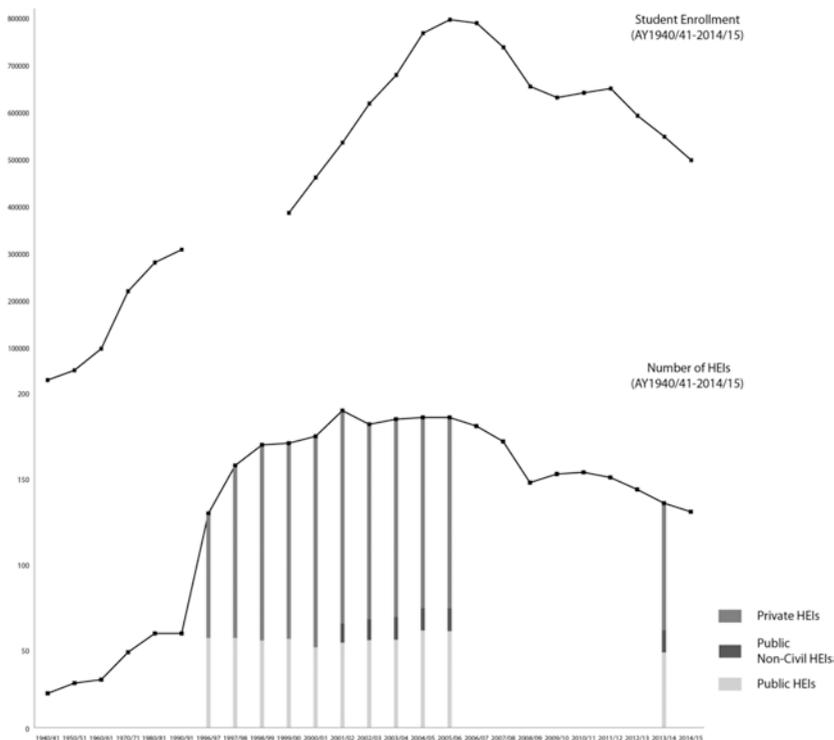


Fig. 8.3 HEI trends over time by institutions 1940–2014 (Sources: Adopted from Brunner and Tillet (n.d.); MoES (2014, 2015); Ministry of Economics (2015); Moskva-Finansy i Statistika [Moscow Finance and Statistics] (1989, 202); OECD (2007, 40); Zhakenov (n.d.))

Thus, in terms of the horizontal institutional diversification of HE after independence, although it remained completely under the auspices of the government through the MoES under the Law “On Education” (1993, 1997), the 1993 law did initially facilitate the establishment of private universities. This helped introduce financial diversity into the previously solely, state-funded sector. In turn, the proliferation of new private HEIs, along with the creation of new universities as a result of merging different institutes, helped to absorb the mass demand for HE.

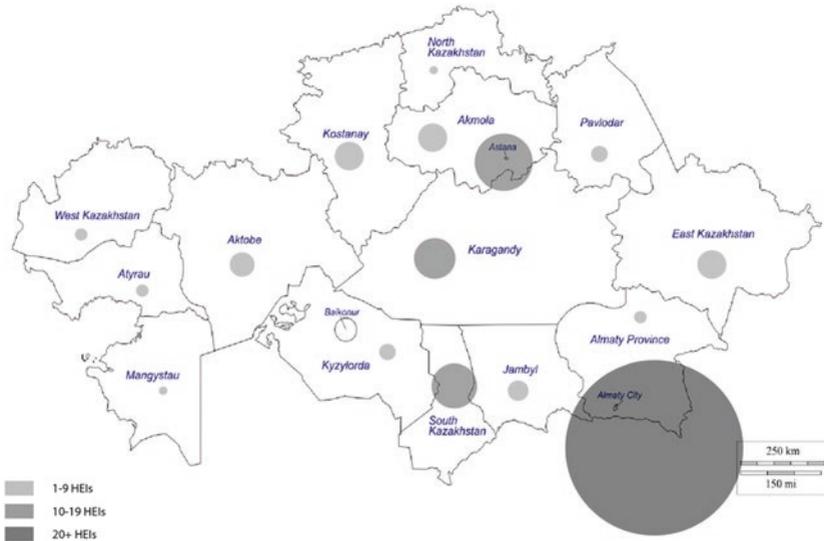


Fig. 8.4 Distribution of universities in Kazakhstan in AY2014–15 (Source: MoES (2015))

THE PRIVATISATION OF HE AND THE MODERNISATION OF HE: THE 2000S

While the 1990s introduced private HEIs into the system, the year 2000 began the process of privatising public HEIs. The general privatisation process of state-owned enterprises initiated in the 1990s was then extended to select HEIs with the passing of the law “On the List of the Republican State Enterprises and Institutions to be Privatised in 2000–01”. The result was that 12 public HEIs became joint-stock companies (JSCs)⁸—a scheme where the Kazakhstani government shares ownership with other shareholders, which could be a private individual(s) or corporation. The privatisation of HEIs was (and continues to be) an attempt to diversification of the funding of higher education by introducing new revenue streams (including student tuition fees). Consequently, the privatisation of HEIs continued the process of horizontal HE diversification.

At that time, eight universities were given the status of “National University”—Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Gumilyov Eurasian

National University, Kazakh National Agrarian University, K.I. Satpayev Kazakh National Technical University, S.D. Asfendiyarov Kazakh National Medical University, T.K. Zhurgenov Kazakh National Academy of Arts, Kurmangazy Kazakh National Conservatory and the Kazakh National University of Arts.

Thus, after diversifying the Kazakhstani HE horizontal institutional landscape with the inclusion of the private sector, the MoES then moved toward creating greater vertical differentiation. Generally, the type of HEI is determined by the institution's licencing, which is based mainly on the number of faculties that institution has—HEIs with three or more faculties can apply to become a university, while those with less than three are designated as an institute. An academy was a HEI that usually had one specialisation (e.g., the Academy of Civil Aviation). However, there are further distinctions which can be made via special Presidential Orders as seen above since the aforementioned Order granted eight universities the status of "National University". National universities are public HEIs that teach a wide gamut of programmes that have made a contribution to HE in the country.

Subsequently, 18 HEIs were established as regional centres of teaching learning (Zhankenov n.d.). These were also categorised as "state universities". Many of these regional or state universities were institutes that were merged in the 1990s in order to provide a diversity of taught program offerings and ultimately to attract more students. Table 8.3 is an overarching taxonomy of HEI types based on institutional mandate and scope and does not include all the different ways Kazakhstani HEIs are classified.

As the MoES continues with institutional privatisation and by extension, with the move toward a free market HE environment, it requires all HEIs to collect a percentage of the student fees which varies by institution in order to prepare them for eventual financial independence. Other policies and practices have been introduced to create an even "playing field" and to increase inter-institutional competition.

A significant part of increasing competition in the HE sector was the need to create a more transparent student admissions process (for both students and HEIs). In the 1990s, Kazakhstani HEIs were initially allowed to admit students based on their academic background and performance and how that fits with an institution's specialisation. In 2001, a new quality assurance system was implemented by the MoES, resulting in the establishment of the Committee for Supervision and Attestation; the National

Table 8.3 HEIs by type based on the law “On Education” (2007)

<i>Type</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Example</i>
Universities		
National research university	A HEI which has a special status and programme of development for 5 years approved by the government, independently developed educational training programmes of higher education in three and more groups of specialties, using the outcome of pure and applied studies for generating, and in the transfer of, new knowledge	Al Farabi Kazakh National University (Almaty)
Research university	A HEI which implements programmes of development for 5 years, approved by the government and educational training programmes of higher education, in three and more groups of specialties. It uses the outcome of pure and applied studies for generating, and in the transfer of, new knowledge	Not defined
University	A HEI that implements educational programmes of higher education, master and doctoral programmes in three and more groups of specialties, carries out pure and applied research and is a scientific and methodological centre	Suleyman Demirel University (Kaskalen)
Academy		
Academy	An educational institution that implements educational programmes of HE in one or two groups of specialties	Academy of Civil Aviation (Almaty)
Institutes		
National higher education institute	A HEI which is a leading scientific and methodological centre in the country with a special status	Not defined
Institute	An institution that implements professional educational programmes of HE	Atyrau Institute of Oil and Gas (Atyrau)

Source: Law “On Education” (2007); National Tempus Office (2012)

Centre for Educational Quality Assessment; the National Accreditation Centre; the Centre for Certification, Quality Management and Consulting; and the National Centre of State Standards for Education and Tests (OECD 2007). To combat public perceptions regarding corruption linked to university admission, the Unified National Test (UNT) (*Edinoe*

Nacional'noe Testirovanie)—a 3-hour university entrance test and also an upper secondary school completion assessment—was developed for AY2003–04.⁹ High scorers on the UNT would be guaranteed admittance to a public university and could receive a full scholarship via state grants. An alternative test—the Comprehensive Test (CT)—was later developed for students who attended: a non-Kazakh/non-Russian language of instruction secondary school, a school abroad but wanted to attend a Kazakhstani university or a vocational/technical secondary school but decided to enter university.

However, while the establishment of these tests addressed issues regarding the perceived corruption connected to university entrance by providing a more standardised measure of academic ability, there remain some unresolved issues. Neither test was or is calibrated to international university entrance standards. Consequently, students who take the UNT or the CT cannot use the scores earned toward admission into universities outside of Kazakhstan. From an assessment standpoint, they have been criticised because of their lack of subject matter depth due to the limits of the current format—30 multiple choice questions per section in 5 subject areas with an emphasis on language.¹⁰

A student's performance on the UNT not only has implications for their HE admission but also to whether students qualify for a government scholarship. These scholarships are “portable”, which means that grant recipients have some choice(s) regarding which HEI they wanted to attend (EC 2010). But the government's priority areas for education and economic development, nationality and language of education determine grant availability. The other factor that is taken into consideration is membership of population categories that are under-represented in the HE student population, which include orphans, students from single-parent homes or from rural communities and young people with disabilities (EC 2010). The MoES also awards other types of scholarships for exceptionally high-achieving students (e.g., Presidential Scholarships). The MoES (2010) also established the “State Education Savings System”, whereby parents can save money for their children's HE costs by providing a premium return on their savings. Note, however, HEIs can also provide different funding support to better attract students including institution-specific financial aid and loans, scholarships for high-achieving students and tuition and fee waivers or discounts.

Systemically, in AY2004–05, the Kazakhstani HE system changed from the 5-year Soviet-era bachelor degree to a 4-year degree. This was intended to facilitate increased student and faculty mobility in and out of Kazakhstan, as well as greater degree of recognition in alignment with international institutional structures (Piven and Pak 2006). This paved the way for discussions regarding the possibility of Kazakhstan joining the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). On 12 March 2010, Kazakhstan then became the first Central Asia Republic to sign the Lisbon Convention of the Bologna Process (BP) becoming its 47th signatory (Kazinform 2010).

Joining the BP has had the most comprehensive impact on the Kazakhstani HE system. Soon after joining the BP, the “State Programme of Education Development in the RoK for 2011–2020” was passed (MoES 2010). This outlined the government’s plan to align all three tiers of education to international standards by the year 2020 in order to achieve its stated goal of “increasing [the] competitiveness of education and [the] development of human capital through ensuring access to quality education for sustainable economic growth” (MoES 2010, 1). The plan was comprehensive, covering everything from financing to the professional development of teacher faculty, along with intended structural and programme changes. The HE focus of this report was on re-aligning its structural, university governance and autonomy reforms to conform to BP priorities. In addition to legislation that was passed in the 1990s, the Law “On Education” (2007) and the Law “On Science” (2011) provided the legal framework that has been guiding HE reform.

In addition to system reform, one of the goals outlined in the MoES plan (2010) was the need to increase institutional and research output to meet international standards. In order to fund and support research, a number of laws have been passed, including the Law “On Science” (2001), Law “On Innovative Activities” (2003), Patent Law (2003) and the Law “On Support of Innovative Activities” (2006). In 2003, less than 100 articles were published per 10,000 researchers (Thomson *n.d.*; OECD 2007). The MoES (2010) stated that the goal was to have 2% of faculty members publish in international, peer-reviewed journals by 2015 and 5% by 2020. But according to MoES (2014), out of 41,636

faculty members, 541 (1.3%) have publications in international (peer-reviewed) journals. In terms of gender parity, there is an almost equal representation of genders among researchers, with the majority of researchers are in the STEM fields—Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (UIS n.d.). However, in terms of researchers by sector, the HE and non-profit sectors have seen a gradual increase between 2005 and 2011 with a decrease in number of researchers in the governmental agencies (UIS n.d.).

The government remains the largest funder of research and development; it is responsible for between 25% (2011) and 61.5% (2003) of all related expenditures (UIS n.d.), which has limited the growth of research and development in HE. After independence, similar to the other post-Soviet countries, the Kazakhstani HE system faced a physically crumbling research infrastructure, in terms of laboratory space, equipment, resource centres and libraries, further constraining the ability of researchers to conduct research (MoES 2010). This is not surprising, given the reduction in the expenditure on research and development since 2003 (UIS n.d.). Relatedly, another systemic constraint on research output is the MoES's constrained funding priorities and by extension research outputs (OECD 2007). However, partnerships between international organisations like the British Council and individual universities (e.g., Al Farabi Kazakhstan National University), are moves to diversify research funding and have contributed to building deeper research capacity of Kazakhstani academics.

Another impetus for Kazakhstan joining the EHEA and committing to the implementation of BP was the internationalisation of HE through faculty and student mobility through programmes like ERASMUS MUNDUS. Systemically, this meant that HEIs would need to adopt the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and provide Diploma Supplements in order to facilitate mobility.¹¹ Moreover, in 1998, Kazakhstan signed an agreement between Belarus, Kyrgyzstan and Russia allowing for degree equivalence recognition, thereby increasing opportunities for student and graduate mobility between the four countries (Poletaev and Rakisheva 2011). Additionally, according to MoES (2010), as of 2010, over 20,000 Kazakhstani students had studied abroad, of whom 3000 were Bolashak scholarship holders.¹² In terms

of in-bound student mobility, Kazakhstan is the second most popular destination to study in Central Asia (behind Russia) (Brunner and Tillet n.d.).

In terms of creating a more transparent system, MoES (2010) articulated a set of relevant HE policy aspirations—to establish a board of trustees at different HEIs to help provide stakeholder-informed governance, to continue the professionalisation of academic administrators (through various training programmes) and to institute a transparent rector-appointment system.¹³ To support academic administrators, the MoES stated its intention of creating a comprehensive and easily accessible database of educational statistics, which would be made available to all universities to facilitate data-informed management decisions. While a database is not yet available, the MoES has been making yearly reports of aggregated HE data available on its website.¹⁴ Also integral to the process of transforming HE provision is the development and implementation of lifelong learning through professional development opportunities for university administrators and leaders. Such training opportunities are being conducted through institutions like Nazarbayev University and KIMEP University.

Along the same vein of transparency, the proliferation of HEIs in the 1990s and 2000s is now being curbed by the emphasis on institutional quality assurance. At its peak, there were 182 HEIs in the system (2001) but by AY2015–16, there were 126 (MoES 2015). In 2011, the Independent Agency for Accreditation Rating (IAAR) was established as an independent national agency with a remit that includes the ranking of HEIs, the improving of their competitiveness, and their institutional and specialised accreditation. The Independent Quality Assurance Agency of Kazakhstan (IQAA) was established in 2012, also an independent national agency but with a remit to provide both institutional and programme accreditation for Kazakhstani HEIs. Out of the 131 universities in AY2014–15, only 3 universities (2%) had received institutional accreditation from the IAAR (www.iaar.kz), 4 (3%) from IQAA (www.iqaa.kz) and only 1 had all of its degree programmes accredited by an agency listed on the European Quality Assurance Register.¹⁵

While joining the BP has increased discussions regarding what constitutes “quality education”, it has also foregrounded a number of policy

tensions which were created in the first 20 years of education reform. One example of this is the tension between the MoES' centralised control over a significant portion of institutional operations and discourses on decentralisation and privatisation. Because one of the pillars of the BP is institutional autonomy, HEIs need to be given more procedural and substantive autonomy. "Procedural autonomy" refers to the ability for universities to make decisions related to higher-level administrative processes. "Substantive autonomy" refers to the ability to make decisions related to academic affairs. The latter would include what degree programmes universities wanted to offer students and, subsequently, the curricular requirements (Soltys 2014). According to MoES (2010), it was intended that HEIs would be granted autonomy gradually—national research universities in 2015, national HEIs in 2016 and the rest by 2018. To date, this has not been the case; the exception is Nazarbayev University, which was established from its inception as an autonomous HEI by Presidential Order.¹⁶

Currently, the reach of the MoES still includes the types of degree programmes HEIs can offer through the list of state classifiers—HEIs cannot innovate degrees or programme titles which are not listed in the list of 342 state classifiers (OECD 2007; Sulima 2008), the standardisation of programme courses and core course curriculum through the State Compulsory Education Standards, the standardisation of faculty promotion and, for public HEIs, the constraints on tuition rates for fee-paying students. According to Sarinzhapov (2013), regardless of whether a HEI is public or private, they all need to comply with the MoES requirements regarding these aforementioned areas in order to maintain their institutional licences.

The centralised control of the MoES also affects research output. While academics need to conduct research and publish in order to receive promotion (according to the same criteria used pre-1991), there remain serious constraints on their time because of heavy teaching expectations, so faculty research output remains relatively low. Such constraints include 800–900 contact hours with students per academic year, mandatory office hours, thesis supervision, student consultations as well as being available for a variety of different activities related to university service, which are prescribed in various education laws. This, combined with low academic salaries and institutional corruption, has resulted in the phenomenon of

faculty teaching at multiple universities—further limiting their time and their personal capacity to conduct original, independent research (Silova and Steiner-Khamsi 2008).

However, if the MoES does begin granting both substantive and procedural autonomy to HEIs, this would significantly change the dynamics between HEIs. Students would more freely be able to choose between meaningfully different programmes of study, educational experiences and curricula, and HEIs would have the ability to potentially innovate and engage directly with industry to produce graduates who would be able to aptly participate in the labour market.

Table 8.4 attempts to provide a comprehensive overview of the different categories that were created by the MoES to delineate and differentiate (horizontally and vertically) the emerging HE landscape between 1993 and 2010.

For potential students, such categories are important because they determine whether their choice of HE is an eligible host for a government scholarship, as well as the quality of education they might receive. But for university rectors and administrators, the categories presented in Tables 8.3 and 8.4 are marginally flexible. Private HEIs can move from being institutes to universities, but by virtue of being private, they currently cannot become national institutions. Because public HEIs are under the auspices of the MoES, there is little major institutional/structural changes which can be initiated by the institutions themselves. The table corresponding to this chapter in the Appendices provides an overview of the total number of HEIs that fit into the categories outlined in Table 8.4 as of AY2014–15.

In addition to the vertical and horizontal institutional distinctions that the MoES has made, it has also created another institutional taxonomy which highlights the university's expected research output based on the official institutional licence it has been granted. This research distinction was based on the Law “On Education” (2007). Logistically, public HEIs can be given the special status of “National University” or “National Higher Education Institute” by means of a Presidential Order. “Research University” is a title which is ostensibly open for both public and private HEIs under the auspices of the Law “On Education” (2007). However, it is noteworthy that to date, no HEI has been officially granted this status.

Table 8.4 The Kazakhstani HE landscape between 1993 and 2010

<i>Type</i>	<i>Vertical</i>	<i>Licensing</i>	<i>Research</i>	<i>Example</i>	<i>Location</i>
International	International	University		Yasawi International Kazakh-Turkish University ^a	Turkestan
Public	Autonomous National	University	x	Nazarbayev University	Astana
		Institute Academy		Al Farabi Kazakh National University Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan	Almaty Astana
Private: JSC	State	University		Atyrau Institute of Oil and Gas	Atyrau
		Institute		KIMEP University	Almaty
		Academy		Academy of Civil Aviation	Almaty
Private		University		Almaty Management University	Almaty
		Institute		Eurasian Humanitarian Institute	Astana
		Academy		Kazakh Academy of Labor and Social Relations	Almaty

^aYasawi International Kazakh-Turkish University is unique because it is a joint education endeavour by the Kazakhstani and Turkish governments.

By default, then, all other HEIs fall under the conventional categories of “university”, “academy” or “institute” with no official distinguishing descriptor. Table 8.5 provides an overview of the types of HEIs, profiles of exemplars and what they define as demonstrations of research in their institutional contexts.

Table 8.5 Characteristics of HEIs

<i>Type</i> (2015)	<i>Type</i> (1991)	<i>Example</i>	<i>Institutional details</i>		<i>Education profile</i> ^a	<i>Research activity</i>	<i>International engagement</i>
National research university	University	Al Farabi Kazakh National University Est. 1934 ^a	Location Status # of students # of faculty	Almaty Public 18,000 2,000	14 faculties, 98 departments, 77 undergraduate, 80 master, 61 doctoral programmes 6 faculties, 15 undergraduate, 10 master, 3 doctoral programmes	5 institutes, 1 science and technology park, 20 research centres	418 university partners, different university association international
Research university	Institute	Ablai Khan Kazakh University of International Relations and World Languages** Est. 1941 ^b	Location Status # of students # of faculty	Almaty Private: JSC 4,750 135+			14 different international organisations, student teaching/exchange 14 different universities
University		Sh. Ualikhanov Kokshetau State University Est. 1962 ^c	Location Status # of students # of faculty	Kokshetau Public 5,000 345	5 faculties, 47 undergraduate, 28 master, 3 doctoral programmes	Lab, academic journal	Partnerships with universities in Germany, the USA, the UK, Malaysia, Russia
Academy	Academy	T. K. Zhurgenov Kazakh National Academy of Arts Est. 1955 ^d	Location Status # of students # of faculty	Almaty Public N/A 400	6 faculties, 14 undergraduate, 13 master, 7 doctoral programmes	Creative production—performances, film production, etc.	63 universities in South Korea, Japan, China, EU, CIS, ME

(continued)

Table 8.5 (continued)

Type (2015)	Type (1991)	Example	Institutional details	Education profile	Research activity	International engagement
National HEI	Institute	I. Alinsarin Arkalyk State Pedagogical Institute**c	Location Status # of students # of faculty	Arkalyk Public – –	4 faculties, 19 undergraduate programmes	
Institute	Specialised institute	K. Satpaev Ekbastuz Engineering- Technical Institute (est. 1994) ^f	Location Status # of students # of faculty	Ekbastis Private 1,145 85	7 department, 14 undergraduate programmes 1 applied research and teaching lab	

NB: * A "faculty" [*fakultet*] is a group of "departments" [*kafedra*], ** indicates potential exemplars (not determined in an official regulation or Order)

^aSee www.kaznu.kz

^bSee www.ablakhan.kz

^cSee <http://kgu.kz/main/en/universitet>

^dSee <http://www.kaznai.kz/>

^eSee <http://www.api.kz/>

^fSee http://etiekb.kz/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=11&Itemid=125

CONCLUSION

While joining the BP should lead to greater convergence across the EHEA, Kazakhstani HE has been embedded in a dynamic sociopolitical cultural context. For example, because the birth rate had declined in the 1990s (Fig. 8.1), HE enrolment is expected to decline from 2011 until around 2025. According to OECD (2007), the number of university-aged young people is expected to fall from 180,000 (2010) to below 120,000 (2025)—a 33% decline over 15 years. Even with the MoES's efforts to close for-profit diploma mill universities between 2001 and 2015, Kazakhstan's demographic drop-off has had serious implications for faculty and staffing at the remaining 126 HEIs, since the majority of Kazakhstani HEIs are private and since all institutions are expected to be financially autonomous by 2020.

From a systemic perspective, the Kazakhstani government has begun implementing many of the Bologna action points since joining the EHEA in 2010. Most notably, it has done the following: developed a necessary legal infrastructure; mapping out governmental and national-level organisational charts; and an array of procedural and substantive university autonomy and reform policies. But despite the plethora of HE reforms proposals and initiatives, there are a number of broad ranging challenges that the MoES continues to face, as Kazakhstan continues to navigate its way through its radical HE reform agenda (Heynemann 2010). For example, the “proliferation of actions, the plethora of agencies and committees and the frequent changes in the related regulations and processes are confusing and overburdening HE stakeholders” (OECD 2007, 117–118). This “proliferation of actions” and constant change are evident even in the way the MoES has been articulating its vision for an HE institutional infrastructure as seen in the MoES different organisational taxonomies presented in Tables 8.4 and 8.5.

Shifts in Kazakhstan's language policies also continue to change the linguistic context in which education is taking place. In AY1990–91, there was a greater percentage of students studying in Russian as compared to Kazakh. According to MoES (2014, 2015), there continues to be a shift in student enrolment from Russian to Kazakh-medium HEIs with a small, but growing number of enrollees in English-medium HEIs (2.6%) in AY2014–15 (MoES 2015).

What remains the most idiosyncratic element of Kazakhstani HE is the role of the government in making decisions regarding HE with little or no

transparency. Despite the existence of education governance in the form of the MoES, moves toward greater transparency and (imminent) institutional autonomy, in actuality, Presidential Orders have been used to establish HEIs—L.I. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, KIMEP University and Nazarbayev University¹⁷—and have led to institutional mergers, Atyrau Institute of Oil and Gas and, most recently, the merger of K.I. Satpaev National Technical University with Kazakh-British Technical University (a JSC university).¹⁸ The primacy of the government to make decisions in and across different sectors points to the reality that in many post-Soviet countries, despite the development of systems and infrastructure, it retains enough power to be able to establish (or dissolve) institutions, initiatives and policies with little or no stakeholder involvement or public debate.

In its first 15 years, the Kazakhstani government focused on establishing the framework for a new HE system—one that would be able to meet the needs of an emerging market economy, thereby pivoting away from the Soviet-style HE infrastructure which it inherited. It has laid the building blocks for its development through the creation of its education-related regulatory structure (1990s) and embracing the BP agenda (2000s). Moreover, it has made strides toward creating a more competitive HE landscape by allowing the establishment of private HEIs, the privatisation of existing public HEIs, and creating a more vertically differentiated structure which ostensibly acts to delineate between “elite” and “mass” HE (Trow 1970). However, areas that will lead toward long-lasting systemic and social change (e.g., curriculum content, programme structures and reporting and audit processes) still require significant amounts of reflection and change, with pre-independence HE organisational and institutional practices remaining entrenched. Moreover, because there has long been a lack of substantive stakeholder involvement in the HE reform process, there has been a lack of incentive to supporting reform implementation processes meaningfully, as evidenced by the disengagement from the reform process of both external stakeholders (business and civil society organisations) and internal stakeholders (faculty, lower- to mid-level administrators and students).

All this has been further problematised by the global economic crisis since 2009, particularly because of the recent downward trend in prices of oil and other natural resources, and the continued devaluation of the Kazakhstani tenge, following the footsteps of the Russian ruble. This has, inevitably, shifted government into austerity mode—cutting public funding for what it deems to be non-essential and non-time sensitive educa-

tional reforms, notably, the delay of implementing twelfth grade education on a larger scale, which has long-run implications for HE reform.

While signing up for the Bologna Process has somewhat clarified the HE vision, its implementation will test the resolve of government to persevere with the post-Soviet reform package. In this sense, Kazakhstan is, itself, a twenty-first century experiment in education reform (Kucera 2014), a process that is taking place in the context of both the geopolitical uncertainties and vulnerabilities in the Central Asia region and the transitional nature of the Kazakhstani economic, social and political environments.

In sum, the legacy of the Soviet Union in Kazakhstan is ambiguous. While there have been departures in terms of institutional types and education financing, its pedagogical legacy (approaches to teaching, learning and programme content) and administrative legacy (approaches to institutional reporting and accountability) remain. Continued change requires the MoES to continue its current trajectory of trying to aligning its HE agenda with the BP in order to continue innovating and preparing young people for work in the twenty-first century.

This chapter focused on the horizontal diversification, vertical differentiation and inter-organisational relationships among Kazakhstani HEIs. It is clear that, systemically, there have been significant departures from the Soviet-era institutions. But meeting future challenges cannot be done by one arm of the government in isolation; rather, it requires collaboration from all levels of governance and from the broad spectrum of HE stakeholders. It is in this area that we argue the lasting imprint of the Soviet legacy is more clearly evident, for example, the intra-institutional operational policies (e.g., student admissions) and the day-to-day practices within different HEIs. Thus, future research on intra-institutional reform could elucidate how transformation is experienced, interpreted and implemented at the local level and would provide a clearer picture regarding sustainable, meaningful and long-lasting transformation.

NOTES

1. A number of schools and faculties were evacuated to the Kazakh SSR after World War II, along with many highly qualified faculty members due to political reasons.
2. Karaganda Pedagogical Institute became the second university in the Kazakh SSR, Karaganda State University in 1972 (<http://www.euni.de/>)

tools/jobpopup.php?lang=en&option=showJobs&jobid=16693&jobtyp=7&university=Buketov+Karaganda+State+University&country=KZ&sid=61473).

3. It should be noted that many institutes conducted applied research for specific industries, for example, the Mining Institute (*Institut Gordnogo Dela*), under the auspices of the Academy of Sciences.
4. See <http://www.constitution.kz>
5. The move toward privileging the Kazakh language started before 1991—the Soviet 1989 Law “On Language” established Kazakh as the state language of the Kazakh SSR. This law was passed when 62% of Kazakhstan’s ethnic Kazakh population indicated they fluently spoke Russian (Smagulova 2008).
6. See http://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=1001895
7. The exceptions were private institutes that were established by Presidential Order (1991), like the Kazakhstan Institute of Management, Economics and Research (KIMEP University since 2011) in Almaty.
8. See http://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=1018504
9. In the Kazakhstani education system, upper secondary includes grades 10 and 11.
10. There has been on-going discussion about cancelling both exams and replacing them with a more comprehensive and rigorous university entrance exam. In 2013, the MoES announced that the UNT would be cancelled by 2015 (Lee 2013). However, at the time this chapter was written, the MoES had yet to provide an alternative university entrance exam and so, the UNT and CT tests were still being administered.
11. A number of Kazakhstani universities have begun implementing the MoES guidelines on ECTS. However, at the degree level, the MoES is struggling to harmonise the ECTS learning-hour with its own teaching-hour credit system without diminishing its student workload requirements for graduation (Dixon and Soltys 2013).
12. The Bolashak scholarship programme was a governmental programme that was instituted in 1994 and selects high-achieving Kazakhstani students to study abroad at top universities on the condition that they would come back and work in-country for a minimum of 5 years to offset brain drain.
13. Currently, all public HEI rectors continue to be political appointees.
14. See <http://www.edu.gov.kz/ru/analytics>
15. Additionally, all HEIs are still currently subject to regular licensing and attestation inspections, which are under the MoES’s purview.
16. See http://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=30914968
17. See http://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=30914968
18. See https://www.interfax.kz/index.php?lang=eng&int_id=10&news_id=8961

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