The challenge
Kazakhstan wants to be among the world’s top 30 developed nations by 2050. To achieve this goal, the government has embarked on a programme of education reform. Its vision is to raise the national education system to international standards, thereby preparing young people for the challenges of the 21st century and giving Kazakhstan a strong skills base for the future.

In 2011, Cambridge International Examinations was engaged by the Autonomous Educational Organisation Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (AEO NIS) to help deliver the government’s reform objectives. This government-funded organisation has set up a network of 20 schools where innovative education practices can be trialled ahead of a roll-out to all state schools.

Our client’s objectives are wide-ranging and complex. The education system needs to blend national and international requirements, with curricula and assessment delivered in three languages (Kazakh, Russian and English) from primary to pre-university level.

Our response
Using our experience of international education and education reform, we have worked closely with AEO NIS to design and deliver new curricula, a new assessment model and examinations, and structured teacher support.

Two key principles underpinned the curriculum and assessment development phase:

1. Integrating the international standards and good practice with locally relevant content.

2. Helping AEO NIS develop the skills and capacity required to continue to develop the curricula and assessment independently.

As well as developing a system of school-based assessment, AEO NIS wanted to develop its own series of qualifications at internationally recognised standards. Our assessment experts quality assure these qualifications, checking they deliver best practice in education and have a positive impact on teaching and learning. This assurance is fundamental to giving students, schools and academic institutions confidence in the new qualifications and their validity.

Our solution has included:

- Development of new curricula in all subject areas, including sciences, humanities and the arts, from primary to high school level.

In collaboration with Cambridge International we have developed an absolutely new curriculum which has no equivalent in our country and in the world. Our educational programme combines the best practices of Kazakhstani and world educational systems.

Olga Mozhayeva, Managing Director, AEO NIS
• In-country assessment services, from test design and delivery to marking and grading.
• New qualifications at an international standard, delivered with a new assessment organisation.
• Key curricula and assessments implemented in Kazakh, Russian and English.
• Review of new textbooks to check they fit with the curriculum.
• Annual monitoring and review of the new curriculum during the implementation phase.
• Introduction of a cycle of school self-evaluation and improvement planning.
• An action research programme for teachers to support innovation.
• Immediate and long-term capacity building, and ongoing professional development, for education management staff and teachers.

Why Cambridge?
This challenging project required in-depth understanding of curriculum and assessment reform to international standards, and practical knowledge of programme implementation and ongoing delivery.

We could provide a high number of experts with proven experience of curriculum and assessment design and delivery, often for government clients, in a wide range of subjects. And importantly, we were able to work in Kazakhstan, long term and in close collaboration with the client, to ensure the programme remained relevant and delivery goals realistic. Our capacity to provide solutions to so many different aspects of the project made us an ideal partner.

As part of the University of Cambridge and Cambridge Assessment, we could also access world-leading resources, skills and research in education. This was deployed in the delivery of key programme components such as an English language curriculum delivered by our sister organisation, Cambridge Assessment English Language, and the action research programme with the Faculty of Education.

Outcomes
• 45 subject programmes introduced
• Over 700 teachers trained annually
• Curriculum centre revising and developing curricula and working with national organisations
• 19 schools running new types of exams
• Assessment organisation delivering accredited exams.

The programme has expanded significantly since 2011, and the task of widening out the reforms to state schools is now underway. We will continue to support AEO NIS during the roll-out and ensure that the quality and reputation of the new qualifications is maintained.

Despite the project’s relatively short timescales, we have helped to develop an education system at international standards, one which can also be a model for other countries facing similar challenges elsewhere in the world.

“Together with Cambridge we have built the capacity of our staff and trained our teachers, and now we have moved to a new level – we are translating the experience of Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools to state secondary schools.”

Olga Mozhayeva, Managing Director, AEO NIS

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