

# Kazakhstan Market Report



## Visit to Almaty, 19 & 20 November 2005, Katie O'Farrell

### Purpose of Visit:

- To attend *Education UK 2005* fair as exhibitor
- To build on relationship with KAEA following Inward Mission from Kazakhstan in February 2005

## Education UK 2005

### Exhibition overview

Some agencies in Kazakhstan have been holding their own B2C fairs for a while, however, this was the first fair in Kazakhstan organised jointly by the members of the Kazakhstan Association of Educational Agents (KAEA).

All member agencies of KAEA (see list at the end of this report) were in attendance at the fair as well as a total of 24 institutions from the UK. English UK arranged for there to be an ELT zone at the fair with a discount for the 13 members who booked in this way.

The fair took place over two days in Almaty, the former capital of Kazakhstan and its largest city at 1.5 million inhabitants. Approximately 700 students attended and although the number of students was lower than the agents' association had anticipated, most institutions agreed that the overall quality of enquiries was extremely high with students who were serious about studying in the UK and who knew what they wanted.

There were a large number of visitors asking about MBA courses as well as young Ukrainians looking to go to university in the UK for undergraduate programmes. University foundation/preparation and English for academic purposes therefore formed most of the enquiries where English language courses were concerned. These enquiries were largely due to the expansion of the government-funded Bolashak scholarship scheme in Kazakhstan. (See below.)

English for business was another very popular line of enquiry as well as English for law and marketing. A small number of mature adults were interested in short-term general English courses for themselves and also for juniors. A very small proportion were older teenagers, aged 15-16, looking for vacation courses.

None of the visitors spoken to expressed particular preferences where accommodation was concerned and there seemed to be an understanding of the costs involved in studying in the UK. This was perhaps a reflection of the seriousness of the visitors in their intention to study abroad.

### **The Bolashak Scholarship Scheme**

The Kazakhstan government funds students to study on undergraduate and postgraduate courses abroad. There were 2,000 Kazakhstanis on the Bolashak programme for 2005/06 and 104 of these went to the UK, the second most popular destination after the USA, which received 200 Bolashak students. Continuous economic growth means that for the 2006/07 academic year the government aims to fund 3,000 students, 500 of which are expected to go to the UK.

The government only funds those students applying to attend universities ranked among the top ten of its priority subjects according to the *Times Good University Guide*.

### **The Market**

The main interest from Kazakhstanis regarding overseas education appears to be ELT, with 2,500 studying English during 2003/04, compared with 120 studying on undergraduate programmes. English as an international language and international qualifications are recognised as leading to greater job opportunities within Kazakhstan and as such are held in high regard.

Confidence in qualifications received in Kazakhstan is continually being eroded due to increasing levels of corruption within the education system, especially at university level. Students applying for under- and postgraduate courses abroad are therefore on the increase, meaning that the number Kazakhstanis looking for university preparation and foundation courses is also growing, especially where help with university placement is offered.

The British Council reports that the most popular subjects for study are: business studies, economics, finance, accounting and HR management; followed by law, marketing, social studies, mechanical engineering, minerals technology, IT, and design. They also report a growing demand for examinations, with IELTS being the main request.

English is part of the state curriculum in Kazakhstan however teaching standards vary. The number of in-country private language schools is on the increase, however teaching and administration standards here also vary; many have opened and closed again within a few months and there is no government regulation of private language schools.

The economic situation in Kazakhstan is extremely stable and year on year growth since 2000 has averaged 10%, with an estimated 9.3% for 2005. The fast growing economy means that well-educated professionals are in great demand, especially those with an international education and outlook. This continued growth has led to the emergence of a middle class with the financial means for international education; while small, this is a growing segment of society. Those who can afford overseas study however tend to be restricted to Almaty and Astana (the capital since 1997), where average salaries are higher than in other cities and the countryside.

### **Visas**

In the period 2004/05 UKvisas records receiving 2,638 student visa applications, of which 270 were refused, or 10.2%, which compares quite favourably with other former Soviet states. In fact, the visa situation in Kazakhstan appears to be an ever improving one as refusal rates have actually come down, being at 16.7% in 2003/04 and 19.7% the year before that. The number of students applying at that time had also dropped.

However, student visa applications to the UK are on the rise again and have grown considerably within the past few years with applications up from 2,084 in the period 03/04 to 2,638 in 04/05. Coupled with the drop in refusal rates, this would appear to be quite promising, and is most likely largely due to the push from the Kazakhstan government to fund students for overseas study.

The decrease in refusals is due to Kazakhstan's economic development which has been significant. Kazakhstan is now considered, for international aid purposes, to be a middle-income country although there is still substantial poverty there. As mentioned, there is a burgeoning middle class and there has been a very considerable increase in the number of student visas for young people wanting to study English.

Where refusals are issued, the main reason would be the cost involved and the financial sacrifice to be made for a family of very modest means. In this situation, where the student is unlikely to benefit much from the course once returning home, entry clearance would probably not be granted.

### **The British Council**

The British Council in Kazakhstan has two offices, one in Almaty and the other in Astana. They also cover Kyrgyzstan. The office would appear to be quite a small one with relatively limited resources for the development of the market.

Promotional activity is undertaken largely through the website with some attendance at educational fairs. As such the British Council supported the fair in Almaty as well as the setting up of the new agents' association, KAEA.

The information centre in Almaty is used for student seminars on choosing a course in the UK and is where the main student counselling activity is focused. A database of students is also kept so that they can be emailed with news and announcements.

British Council Kazakhstan-Kyrgyzstan offers the following services to UK exporters free of charge:

- Information on local education and training systems
- Outline of host government policies on education development
- Contact details of institutions and relevant individuals
- Information on local agents and fairs
- Travel advice
- Storage and display of reasonable amounts of promotional materials.

### **Agents**

Most agents in Kazakhstan now belong to the Kazakhstan Association of Educational Agents (see end) and these seem to be pretty reputable. Nevertheless, there were one or two teething problems with the set up of the association and the organisation of the fair in terms of agents working together as partners rather than acting in competition with each other. This may be something to be aware of when working with agents of the association.

Some time was spent chatting to agents informally regarding the idea accreditation for agents and all those spoken to responded positively to this proposal.

## Other Events

- Educational events taking place in Kazakhstan are:

The All-Kazakhstan International Education Fair (AKIEF) 2006

Organised by Globus Education Agency

To be held Feb/Mar 2006 in Astana, Almaty, Atyrau, Aktobe, Chimkent

<http://www.globus-almaty.com/fair.html>

Kazakhstan International Education Fair (KEIF) 2006

Organised by Intellect Agency

To be held 8-10 April, Almaty

<http://www.intellect.kz/keif1/index.html>

## SWOT Analysis

<b>Strengths</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Stable and fast growing economy</li><li>• Government support for international education</li><li>• Increasing professionalism of agents</li><li>• Informed students and parents with positive attitude to international education</li></ul>	<b>Weaknesses</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Overseas study still outside majority reach</li><li>• Few resources for British Council</li><li>• Despite country size, main market restricted to Astana and Almaty</li><li>• Internet use at 1.6% (2002)</li></ul>
<b>Opportunities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Growing market for study abroad within emerging middle class</li><li>• Increasing demand from companies for well-educated English speakers</li><li>• Further funding for more Bolashak students</li></ul>	<b>Threats</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• ELT providers in Kazakhstan</li><li>• Increasing demand for distance learning</li><li>• Competition from USA</li></ul>

##	Name of the agency	Contact person	Address	Tel.	e-mail	Web-site
1	Anglo-Kazakh Centre	Ms. Aisulu Zhumagulova	114 Tulebayev str. 1	+7 3272 729876, 507553	<a href="mailto:anks@nursat.kz">anks@nursat.kz</a>	<a href="http://www.akc.kz">www.akc.kz</a>
2	Global Language Link	Mrs. Klara Kaziyeva	28 Shevchenko str. 30	+7 3272 614523, 721989	<a href="mailto:global_link@nursat.kz">global_link@nursat.kz</a>	
3	Euroschool	Ms. Aigerim Argancheyeva	174 Tulebayev str. 1	+7 3272 616617, 616160	<a href="mailto:euroschool@kaznet.kz">euroschool@kaznet.kz</a>	<a href="http://www.key.kz">www.key.kz</a>
4	Globus Education	Mr. Saginbek Shunkeyev	126 Naurizbay str	+7 3272 727079, 720988	<a href="mailto:globus-almaty@nursat.kz">globus-almaty@nursat.kz</a>	<a href="http://www.globus-almaty.com">www.globus-almaty.com</a>
5	Linguistic Centre	Mrs. Gulnara Seisenbayeva	40 Kurmangazy str. 19	+7 3272 670745, 670748, 722641	<a href="mailto:lingyfu@kaznet.kz">lingyfu@kaznet.kz</a>	<a href="http://www.pfling-yfukaz.org">www.pfling-yfukaz.org</a>
6	M&K Language School	Ms. Aigul Suleimenova, Ms. Nailya Suzhenova	98 Panfilov str.	+7 3272 588583, 582861	<a href="mailto:mkschools@mks.kz">mkschools@mks.kz</a> <a href="mailto:Aigul_s@mks.kz">Aigul_s@mks.kz</a>	<a href="http://www.mks.kz">www.mks.kz</a>
7	Regent Calderdale	Mr. Sayat Imadiyev	30 Dzhandosov str. 2	+7 3272 755111, 643307	<a href="mailto:imadiyev@samal.kz">imadiyev@samal.kz</a>	
8	Intellect	Mrs. Marina Khan	118 Dzhambul str 41	+7 3272 423708, 429738	<a href="mailto:info@intellect.kz">info@intellect.kz</a>	<a href="http://www.intellect.kz">www.intellect.kz</a>
9	International Coordination Centre	Mrs. Zhazira Dyusembekova	152 Naurizbay batyr str. 1	+7 3272 777522, 777525	<a href="mailto:office@iccplus.kz">office@iccplus.kz</a>	<a href="http://www.icc-education.com">www.icc-education.com</a>