

In Kazakhstan, licenses of 25 universities were revoked and over 60 universities were left without the government contract. According to the ministry of education, the majority of licenses were revoked after the audit.

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Madina received a degree in psychology at the university of Taldykorgan. However, it can hardly be called the study - all examinations were passed by bribes.

«I was absent for six months, I just sent money to the monitor, she solved all issues. After I graduated, I found a job, I receive salary, my employment is official. I don't perform surgeries, so I don't feel ashamed for that. Every person survives in this life. My cousin gave a cow to her acquaintances to get a job of a mathematics teacher,» the girl said.

The quality of higher education and its optimisation are long-lasting issues in Kazakhstan. In April 2019, the chair of the committee of the parliament senate, Murat Bakhtiyaruly, said the majority of private universities do not provide quality education and just collect money.

«According to the migration committee, 6 million migrant workers arrived in the country from Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in the last 7 years. They filled the vacancies in the area of construction, agriculture, and public services. However, 1 million of graduates of domestic universities do not work in the field they are qualified for. Every year, we spend the funds of the state and parents to train tens of thousands specialists who are not needed on the market, thus increasing the number of unemployed,» he said.

In December 2019, the president of Kazakhstan, Kassym Zhomart Tokayev instructed the government to take measures to universities who issue diplomas nonstop.

«The government must take strictest measures against the universities, including private ones, that turned into offices, to be honest, that print out and issue diplomas. The whole system of education is thus being undervalued and discredited. The reputation of our state is being damaged,» said Kassym Zhomart Tokayev at the ceremony of closing the Year of Youth and opening the Year of Volunteers at Nur-Sultan.

According to him, the idea of Nursultan Nazarbayev about establishment of one strong university and two high-level colleges in every region will solve many problems.

According to director of public movement «Bilimger» **Ryskeldi Aidynbekova**, Kazakhstan has private economic universities that train physicians, or agricultural universities that train philologists and even journalists.

«Why this problem was not solved until the president interrupted? Because there's a powerful person who's someone's friend, son-in-law, relative, etc. behind every university. There are people who lobby these universities. Ex-minister of education Yerlan Sagadiev tried to take measures to revoke licences of some universities, but he didn't gather support. Now the process has been launched,» Aidynbekova said.

It's all about price

Both daughters of **Lyazzat Bolatova** have graduated from universities, earned degrees, but not knowledge. The elder daughter is a qualified history teacher, but she feels ashamed of working at school because she does not know anything about the subject.

«My elder daughter didn't attend classes, although she was an A student at school. She always made excuses saying they were free to attend classes. Four years passed and everything was fine. My daughter said her fellow students brought meat, candies, champagne to faculty members during examinations. Thus they met their lecturers in person. [...] Now universities print out diplomas, it's a kind of business,» Bolatova said.



Photo courtesy of Lyazzat Bolatova

The number of universities in Kazakhstan started to increase after it became independent. There were 47 universities in 1991, 185 in 2001, and then the number started to decline gradually.

Number of universities in Kazakhstan decreased 1.5 times in 18 years

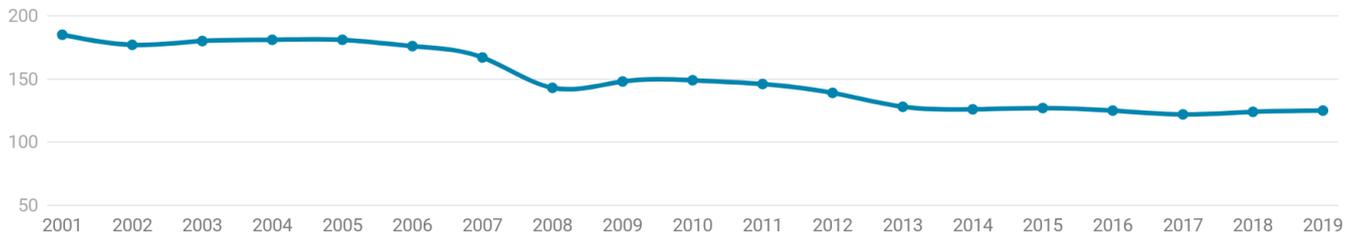


Chart: Cabar.asia • Source: Bureau of National Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan • Created with Datawrapper

However, the number of university students in 2019 increased almost by 15 per cent compared to 2001.

Number of university students in Kazakhstan rises

(thousand people)

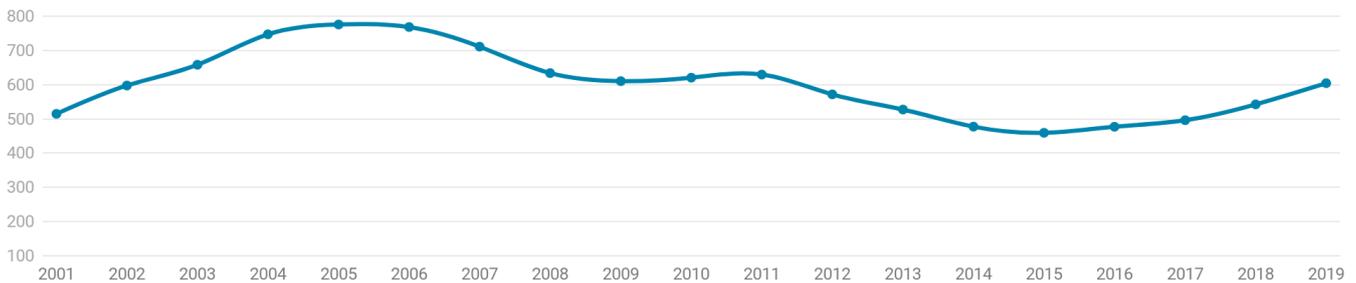


Chart: Cabar.asia • Source: Bureau of National Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan • Created with Datawrapper

However, according to «Atameken», about 60 per cent of alumni cannot find work they are qualified for.

«This issue was raised several years in a row. We have universities registered in two- or three-room apartments. They have pretentious names: international university, higher school, etc. It’s just a great marketing activity. Only lazy people do not have higher education now. They ladle out diplomas of higher education, they can even write a master’s thesis for you, it’s all about price,» doctor of philological sciences **Serik Makashev** said.

An honoured teacher **Sabit Zharmembetov** resigned from the university voluntarily. According to him, universities don’t have enough literature, physical infrastructure is in deplorable condition, students attend them not for knowledge, but for diplomas.

«Even those who failed to get a threshold score at ENT study at universities and receive

diplomas. How can we speak about good specialists? Back in our days, only top-rank pupils could enrol and it was very prestigious. Now all have five, six diplomas each. When you ask them, «where are you going to work at?», they say they already have a good job prepared for them, and they just have to receive a diploma,» Zharmembetov said.

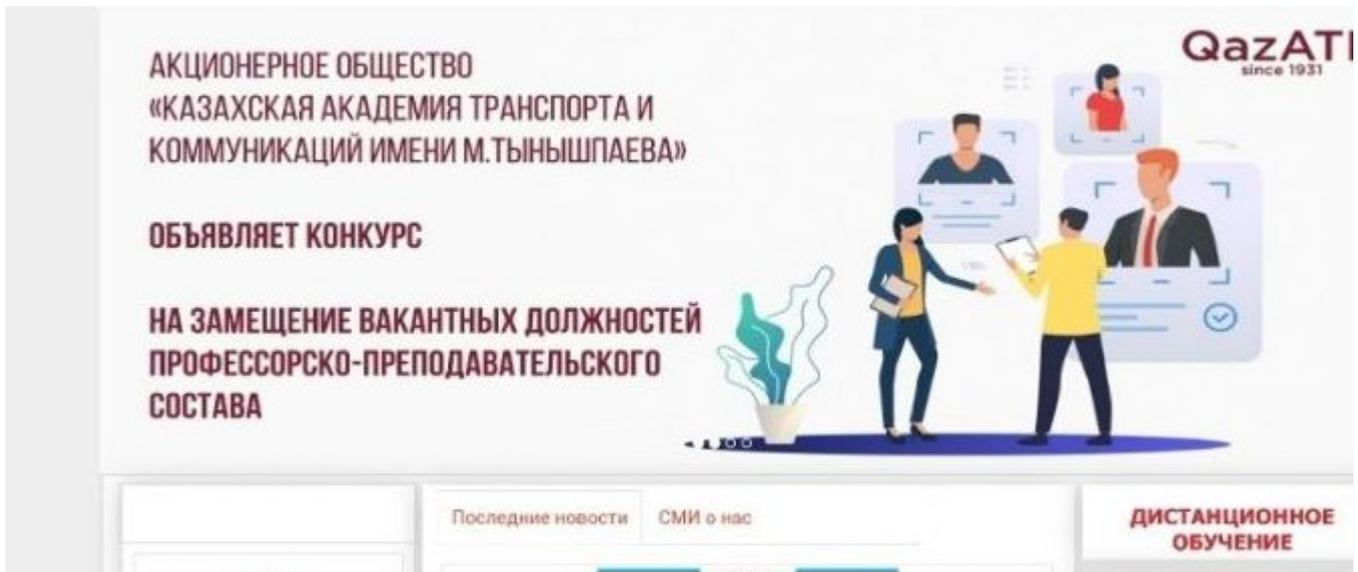
The optimisation of universities designed by the ministry of education started with the requirement strengthening. When the educational institutions were audited, there were facts of student enrolment without special examinations, 086-U form medical certificates, original certificate of the Unified National Test, and specialised subject scores. The agency filed a lawsuit against some universities that hindered the state audit.

«For example, the Regional Innovation Institute has 35 thousand students. We closed down this university as it did not hold any classes, and did not provide us with relevant information. Also, we closed down some other universities. Our lawsuit against other universities are still pending. We should act within the law,» minister of education and science Askhat Aimagambetov said.

In early October 2020, the committee for quality assurance in education and science of the ministry of education and science of Kazakhstan revoked a license of the M.Tynyshpaev Kazakh Academy of Transport and Communications.

«In particular, the academic process lacked the quality teaching staff, internship bases, necessary educational, methodological and research literature,» according to the ministry.

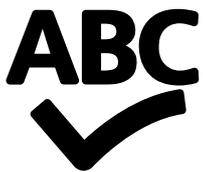
Despite this fact, the university is still functioning. Its website has recently announced vacancies, although it should stop working ten business days after the decision, according to the law.



In May this year, president Kassym-Zhomart Tokayev said that 10 Kazakhstan universities must enter top 500 best universities in the world by 2025. So far, the higher education reform takes a slow pace in the country.

Main photo: 24.kz

This article was prepared as part of the Giving Voice, Driving Change - from the Borderland to the Steppes Project.



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