

MoU Signed for New SPCE Centre in Kabul



Signing of the MoU in Kabul. L to R: Dr. Najmuddin Najm, CEO of AKF-Afghanistan; Najeebullah Musafirzada, CEO of AKES-Afghanistan.

UCA's School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPCE) is coming to Kabul, the capital and largest city of Afghanistan. On December 16th 2020, three agencies of the Aga Khan Development Network, the University of Central Asia (UCA), the Aga Khan Foundation-Afghanistan (AKF-A), and the Aga Khan Education Services-Afghanistan (AKES-A) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to establish an SPCE located in Kabul.

The virtual signing of the MoU took place during an online ceremony, with AKF-A, and AKES-A officials affixing their signatures in Kabul, and UCA officials in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Kabul will be the sixth SPCE location in Afghanistan, and like the other five centres, it will operate under the AKF-A umbrella. It will initially offer high-level English language programmes based on the Cambridge Assessment English curricula and English for Academic Purposes.

In his opening remarks, Dilovar Butabekov, SPCE Director, gave a brief history of SPCE programs and underlined the impact these short courses have had in improving the quality of life of local communities. He emphasized that the increasing participation of women in these courses was particularly encouraging.

The President of the Ismaili National Council for Afghanistan, Aitmadi Amirbaig, thanked all three agencies for the SPCE expansion, and expressed hope that UCA would also establish and deliver Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Kabul.

Ms. Sherazade Hirji, Diplomatic Representative of AKDN in Afghanistan, described the new development as a strategic move and a new milestone for SPCE. "While in Kabul today there are many public and private organisations, what is missing is excellence and quality in the educational system."

Prof Dr. S. Sohail H. Naqvi, Rector of UCA, noted that despite the Covid-19 pandemic, SPCE has been making great efforts to provide quality programs in Afghanistan.

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UCA and Tajikistan Minister of Industry and New Technologies Explore Collaborations

At a meeting with the Minister of Industry and New Technologies of Tajikistan held in Dushanbe on 1st December 2020, several possible collaborations with the University of Central Asia were explored. The Minister, Sherali Kabir, highlighted that UCA could play an important role in the development of the education sector in the country, particularly in the field of mining and environmental protection.

Another area of discussion was the possible establishment of a High Technology Park in Khorog, along the lines of a similar Park in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Such a Park could offer special tax exemptions in a free economic zone to encourage the establishment of Information Technology businesses. Following on the success of the



Muzaffar Jorubov, Chief Operating Officer of UCA briefing Minister Sherali Kabir (right) about the programmes and achievements of the University of Central Asia. Dr. Maxim Khomyakov, Dean of UCA's School of Arts and Sciences is second from left.

[Digital Transformation Conference](#) organized by UCA in Kyrgyzstan in 2019, the possibility of a similar conference in Tajikistan in 2021 was also discussed.

New SPCE Centre in Kabul



At the signing of the MoU in Bishkek. Clockwise: Prof Dr. S. Sohail H. Naqvi, Rector of UCA; Dr. Bohdan Krawchenko, Dean of UCA's Graduate School of Development; Akylbek Joldoshev, Quality Assurance Officer at SPCE; Dilovar Butabekov, Director of UCA's SPCE.

He cited the English language learning and testing programme (CATs) as a good example of innovation and a timely response to the situation. He described Afghanistan as "a land of opportunities," and said innovation would help bring back glory to the country. He also mentioned previous discussions about opening a UCA campus in Afghanistan, which he said would depend on funding opportunities.

SPCE efforts have been life-changing, said Dr. Najmuddin Najm, Chief Executive Officer of AKF-A in his remarks. "Years back it was very hard to find men and women

with better education or people who valued quality education. But, today, when we visit Nusai we find many young girls and women taking UCA's SPCE course, and graduates of these programs working in that community". He expressed AKF-A's commitment to strengthening this partnership and supporting UCA programs.

Najeebullah Musafirzada, Chief Executive Officer of AKES-A, expressed hope that the partnership, which is part of SPCE's five-year strategic plan to build locations in capital cities, would further elevate the quality of learning in Kabul. He also noted

the successful partnership of AKES-A and UCA in Badakhshan. AKES-A has agreed to provide the facilities, electricity, ancillary staff, and access to the Internet for the program on a pro-bono basis.

The Dean of UCA's Graduate School of Development, Dr. Bohdan Krawchenko, offered the closing remarks, in which he recalled the SPCE 2017 graduation ceremony in Ishkashim and said "it was a wonderful achievement to see that SPCE programs have helped to empower women and girls by providing them with high quality English language skills up to higher intermediate levels."

Naryn Smart City Project Gets a Boost with SPCE Training



Evgeny Shibkov, GIS specialist at UCA's Mountain Societies Research Institute, responds to questions from City Hall trainees.

The digital skills training being delivered by UCA's School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPCE) for Naryn City Hall officials and staff has been progressing at a steady pace, with theoretical courses being complemented by hands-on learning.

On 12th November 2020, trainees got acquainted with the geographic information system (GIS) module. The training was conducted by Evgeny Shibkov, an employee of UCA's Mountain Societies Research Institute and GIS specialist with over 10 years of experience. They practiced online GIS mapping and modelling at SPCE, as well as at a GIS centre located

at Naryn's City Hall, where the Taza-Naryn Municipal Enterprise demonstrated some orders in real time.

Designed for three months, the training includes six modules on information technology: word processing, spreadsheets, database, networking fundamentals, GIS, and cybersecurity. UCA trainers and specialists from Naryn and Bishkek conduct the training. Training for 18 participants began in October as part of Naryn City Hall's Smart City pilot project, of which UCA is a key partner. The project is part of the Government of Kyrgyzstan's digital transformation priorities.

Panel Discussion: Blockchain As Good Governance Technology



(Top row L to R): Anthony Kalaikovan, Anatoly Motkin, Valery Vavilov, (Middle row): Prof. Dr. S. Sohail H. Naqvi, H. E. Sherali Kabir, Misha Nahin, (Bottom row): Shaukat Ali Khan, Azizjon Azimi.

Governments, educational institutions and the private sector in Eurasia must take on the challenge of harnessing the potential of blockchain technology for good governance and development, said panellists at an online discussion organized by the University of Central Asia and StrategEast center for a new economy on 17th December 2020.

“New technologies, including blockchain, are the future of our country,” said Sherali Kabir, Tajikistan’s Minister of Industry and New Technologies, in his opening remarks at the “Blockchain As Good Governance Technology” discussion. “We want our youth to develop new technologies, and change not only the structure of Tajikistan’s economy, but also create conditions for the world to know more about our country.” He emphasized the country’s green and eco-energy potential, and the favorable conditions for the development of blockchain technologies.

Blockchain is often described as a “digital

ledger” that stores transactions between two parties in open, transparent, and shared databases that cannot be deleted or revised. Valery Vavilov, Founder and CEO of Bitfury Group, a full-cycle company and global leader in the blockchain industry, said blockchain will have the strongest effect for governments in the following areas: public procurement, land title registries, electronic voting, grant disbursement, and corporate ownership registries.

During the discussion, concerns were raised by some in the audience about issues such as the security of products created on the blockchain, data protection, voting, and the effect of machines on human behaviour and interaction.

Vasyl Zadvornyy, CEO of the Ukrainian state enterprise Prozorro DP, underscored the need to build trust between state and citizens. “The process of public procurement in post-Soviet countries has traditionally been associated with two things: it is ei-

ther a very large bureaucracy, or corruption.” Introducing Prozorro, a fully digital procurement system, he said that it helped Ukraine address these challenges, noting that it has saved \$2.8 billion for Ukraine during 3.2 million tenders.

Asked what advice can be offered to governments regarding blockchain, Vavilov said they must create international centres that can design standards in the field. “This should not be confused with blockchain regulation, because blockchain is regulation itself.”

Blockchain is only the beginning of the journey, said Misha Hanin, CEO & Co-Founder at Deep Dive Technology. He noted, “We cannot regulate the blockchain, but we should regulate the products, such as in the fields of finance and recycling.”

Anthony Kalaikovan, Chief Technology Officer at Serba Dinamik Holdings Berhad, said blockchain is a reliable technology which assures data privacy, and cited the example of medical records and other private data. “Thanks to blockchain technology, a citizen can choose who is given access to this data and who is not. While a citizen may transfer data to the state, the key remains in his or her own hands.”

Prof. Dr. S. Sohail H. Naqvi, Rector of the University of Central Asia, and Anatoly Motkin, President of StrategEast Centre for a new economy, opened the panel with welcome remarks. They noted the importance of modern education meeting the requirements of a new digital era. Today’s university graduates will have to take on the challenges of digitizing Eurasia, they said. The panel discussion was moderated by Shaukat Ali Khan, Chief Information Officer at UCA.

UCA Publication: Free Download



Dark Clouds over the Silk Road: Challenges Facing Mountain Environments in Central Asia

Central Asia is a vital link in the huge Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) that follows much of the ancient Silk Road routes in this region. Other than the economic expansion and trade benefits associated with this complex infrastructure system, little is known about the many of the exogenous issues and direct environmental and socioeconomic impacts surrounding the BRI in Central Asia. This opinion paper takes a sharper look at some of these externalities and potential effects through a sustainability lens. The publication in Russian language is available for [free download](#).

Experts Stress Need to Invest in Digital Resilience to Address Future Pandemics



(Top row L to R): Dr. Myung-ha Hong from Korea's National Information Society Agency (NIA) and a colleague; Hyejeong Lim from NIA; J.P. Auffret, President of International Academy of CIOs; Yoonseok Ko, Vice President of NIA; (Middle row): Prof. Hoonsang Lee, Yonsei University; Dr Sang-hoon LEE, Managing Director of KAIA; Prof. Dr. S. Sohail H. Naqvi, UCA Rector, UCA; Shaukat Ali Khan, Chief Information Officer UCA; (Bottom row): Louise Chamberlain, UNDP Resident Representative to the Kyrgyz Republic; Altynbek Ismailov, Chairman, SCITC; and Naveed Hassan Naqvi, World Bank Country Manager for the Kyrgyz Republic.

The Covid-19 pandemic has underscored the need for governments, civil society, academia, and other institutions around the world to cooperate and develop partnerships to achieve digital resilience that enable them to be more agile in responding to global crises.

This was a recurring theme among panelists during an online workshop, Learning from Korea's Digital Response to COVID-19, hosted by the University of Central Asia on 10th December 2020.

"We have to be prepared for another Covid-like pandemic. We don't know when and where it will strike," warned Yoonseok Ko, Vice President of the National Information Society Agency of Korea (NIA). "It's important for us to be united and to respond jointly" said Ko, noting the devastating impact of the pandemic on people's lives, including a record number of deaths, and jobs and businesses losses.

Korean experts emphasized that while leveraging technology helped Korea address Covid-19 effectively, having a transparent, trustworthy, public health response and wide citizen cooperation, was equally important.

Naveed Hassan Naqvi, World Bank Country Manager for the Kyrgyz Republic

said the pandemic should be a wake-up call for everyone. "The message is clear: Safeguarding digital opportunities and helping countries achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) require investments in digital resilience, and multi-stake partnerships."

Louise Chamberlain, UN Development Programme (UNDP) Resident Representative to the Kyrgyz Republic, said that the UN's position on digital technology is anchored on the values of the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. She cited how digital technology helped address cases of domestic violence in Kyrgyzstan which surged by 65% during the pandemic. UNDP and UNICEF organized a hackathon that brought together programmers and crisis centre workers to look at solutions to mitigate effects of quarantine. Within 48 hours, 53 programmers developed 18 products to help women and children in difficult domestic situations and prototypes were developed.

"While the toll of the Covid-19 pandemic has been heavy for many people around the world, governments, civil society, and other institutions need to look at how to convert this catastrophe into an opportunity for accelerating digital resilience," said Prof. Dr. S. Sohail H. Naqvi, Rector of

the University of Central Asia. "For us at UCA, responding to the challenges of remote mountain communities, digital resilience is a reality we experience daily, not just from a business point of view, but also from an educational perspective."

Prof. Hoonsang Lee of Korea's Yonsei University walked participants through Korea's various Covid-19 responses, in particular, its "3T" approach (tracing, testing, treatment), which has so far been able to limit cases to 30,000, and deaths, to 500.

Sanghyun Jang, director of Korea Education and Research Information Service (KERIS) discussed how the delivery of education "changed in one stroke" because of the pandemic. As classes pivoted from classrooms to online learning, Jang said schools in Korea began offering hybrid or mixed learning. Korean educators are now looking at the pandemic as "a golden time to innovate and change education."

Altynbek Ismailov, Chair of the State Committee of Information Technologies and Communications of the Kyrgyz Republic (SCITC), welcomed the opportunity for Kyrgyzstan to learn more about Korea's "excellent track record of controlling the pandemic," and to work with Korean partners in building digital resilience in the country.

TV Interview Showcases Unique Qualities of UCA



Dr. Elmira Kochumkulova (right) presents TV1.KG host Erkin Dzhamanbaev with copies of two books published by UCA's Cultural Heritage and Humanities Unit.

Excitement is building up as the University of Central Asia's first batch of students prepare to graduate in 2021, according to Dr. Elmira Kochumkulova, Head of UCA's Cultural Heritage and Humanities Unit, during an [interview with TV1.kg](#) on 7th December 2020.

Dr. Kochumkulova, spoke at length about UCA, describing it as a unique university with a unique mission. "Our campuses are not built in big cities, but in remote mountainous areas," she said, adding that UCA's mission is to improve the socio-economic

well-being of the region, particularly its mountain communities, while preserving and promoting the rich cultural heritage of the region, and passing it on to the next generation.

She also took the opportunity to promote the book, *The Music of Central Asia*, which she co-edited with Theodore Levin, an ethnomusicologist who studies the art of music in Central Asia, and Saida Daukeeva, an ethnographer and expert in the theory of Arabic music.

The book, published by Indiana University Press, is playing an invaluable role in showcasing Central Asian music and filling gaps in the teaching of world music, she said. Dr. Kochumkulova also talked about CHHU's role in supporting regional scholars through the study, preservation, documentation, and archiving of the region's cultural heritage, and about UCA's Cultural Heritage Book series.

Education Officials Tour SPCE Faizabad Facilities



Students and staff brief MHE officials about SPCE programmes and courses.

A delegation from the Ministry of Higher Education (MHE) visited UCA's School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPCE) in Faizabad, Afghanistan, for an introductory tour in November. Qasim Aira, Director of Badakhshan University, also joined the tour of the learning centre, including the classrooms and computer lab, which was recently handed over to his university. The visit include a meeting with the faculty and students to learn more about SPCE programmes and courses.

"Badakhshan University and its students are lucky to have this centre here and I can say that this centre is like the right hand of the Badakhshan University, where most of the students, faculty members and lecturers are building their potential," said Habibullah Sulaimanzay, head of the delegation and Board member of the Quality Assurance Department of MHE.

SPCE Donates Books to Khorog State University



Farrukhsho Fraidonov (left), Head of SPCE in Tajikistan, and Mahbub Rajabekov, Dean of the Department of Foreign Languages of Khorog State University.

UCA's School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPCE) in Khorog, Tajikistan, recently donated 190 textbooks and audio resources for learning English to the Khorog State University (KSU). The books were handed over by Farrukhsho Fraidonov, Head of SPCE in Tajikistan, to Mahbub Rajabekov, Dean of the Department of Foreign Languages of KSU, during a ceremony in November.

Founded in 2006, SPCE offers post-secondary and continuing education, giving young people and adults professional and vocational qualifications and income generating opportunities. It provides services in 14 learning centres located in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Afghanistan.

Local Designer Joins Roster of SPCE Entrepreneurship Graduates

Temirlan Zhumadylov, a professional clothing designer who counts Kyrgyz pop stars and public figures among his regular clientele, was one of 100 participants who successfully completed an entrepreneurship training program at UCA's School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPCE) in Bishkek. The program was part of the "Demilgeluu Jashtar" project funded by USAID in the Kyrgyz Republic.

Temirlan, who also conducts tailoring and sewing courses for unemployed women and girls, was among 30 graduates who received a grant for the purchase of equipment for business development. Temirlan used his grant to buy more sewing machines, product racks, mannequins, and an ironing table.

During the training, participants were given lessons on business planning, generating business ideas and starting their own businesses. The "Demilgeluu Jash-



Kyrgyz local designer, Temirlan Zhumadylov (right), proudly displays his certificate of completion from SPCE.

tar" project aims to increase economic employment and civic engagement of young people in the Kyrgyz Republic. It is implemented by the Mountain Societies Development Support Programme

for Kyrgyzstan, University of Central Asia, Association of Social Entrepreneurs, International Educational Debate Association of Central Asia, and Accelerate Prosperity.

SPCE Kicks Off Media Literacy Course for Teachers



The program is funded by the U.S. Embassy in Kazakhstan.

UCA's School of Professional and Continuing Education in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, began a free online English for Media Literacy Course on December 10. Funded by the U.S. Embassy in Kazakhstan, the five-week course is designed for non-native English speakers interested in studying media literacy.

It includes learning about different types of media, both traditional and modern. Participants are taught how to check and study information, expand their vocabulary, and how to analyze local and foreign media. There has been an encouraging response from participants about the content of this course, and the need to offer more such training programmes.

Training for Winter Tourism in Kazakhstan in the Age of Covid



Participants at the online training on tourism.

UCA's School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPCE) in Tekeli, Kazakhstan recently conducted a series of online trainings on tourism, with support from the Almaty Region's Department of Tourism.

The first session in November focused on improving the quality of services and quarantine measures during Covid-19, and was attended by administrators and owners of tourist recreation sites. Subsequently, a second session was organized for civil servants working in tourism and other related industries. Over 100 people took part in the trainings conducted by experts from Almaty and Taldykorgan.

Student Credits SPCE for Helping Fulfill her Dream

Mizhgona Okhoniyoza had always dreamed of studying in another country. She realized that she needed to step up her English skills in order to do so. In 2017, she decided to take the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programme, which is taught at SPCE by professional instructors with international experience. EAP strengthens English language skills and prepares students for international exams such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and International English Language Testing System (IELTS).

After completing the EAP, Mizhgona decided to pursue the Post-Graduate Preparation Programme (PGPP) developed by the London-based Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS). Not only did her English improve

considerably, the experience also helped widen her outlook, expand her general knowledge and strengthen her ethical values. It didn't come as a surprise that this year, Mizhgona entered the IIS to study the Secondary Teacher Education Programme (STEP). Founded in 2007, STEP is for practising and prospective teachers who wish to teach within the wider Aga Khan Network of Institutions.

According to its website, STEP admits "exceptional graduates and works with them to develop their skills and shape them into teachers and mentors who can inspire and teach." STEP includes a master's level teacher preparation, which the Institute undertakes together with University College London's Institute of Education, and School



Mizhgona Okhoniyoza in London.

of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) University of London. Mizhgona says she is proud to have chosen SPCE "as the first step towards my professional achievements."

Covid-19 Awareness Campaign Continues at SPCE Centres



Students maintain physical distancing as they listen to a presentation on new Covid-19 protocols.

UCA's School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPCE) in Afghanistan has been working in partnership with the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) and the Aga Khan Health Services (AKHS) in a continuing COVID-19 awareness campaign for staff and students, encouraging them to share the latest Covid-19 protocols with their families and local communities.

As part of the campaign, participants have been provided information brochures with detailed descriptions of Covid-19 and precautionary protocols. It not only provides guidance on how to help control the spread of infection, but also provides tips on how to strengthen one's immune system through proper nutrition. More than 55 students and staff recently attended an information session at the SPCE learning centre in Ishkashim, Afghanistan.

Students are encouraged to share the information with family members and their local communities. Despite low literacy rates in the area, residents appreciate the value of scientific knowledge in stemming the Covid tide.

SPCE and At-Bashy Administration Discuss Plans for Future Cooperation



SPCE and At-Bashy officials discuss areas of cooperation. Nurbek Nisharapov is third from left.

UCA's School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPCE) in Naryn, Kyrgyzstan, will conduct programmes together with district school directors and teaching staff of neighbouring At-Bashy region.

The agreement was reached in November between Nurbek Nisharapov, Head of SPCE in Naryn, and Nurbek Satarov, Akim district administration representative of the At-Bashy region.

Satarov expressed interest in SPCE programs, in particular the language and national testing preparation courses for schoolchildren, and the entrepreneurship programme.

The At-Bashy administration also expressed its gratitude for SPCE's close cooperation in the field of education, and for conducting preparatory courses on National Testing for high school students from remote areas. It is worth noting that in 2020, two SPCE graduates from At-Bashy district received Gold certificates based on their results at National Testing.

Jaralysh Thrills Audiences in Bishkek



The Kyrgyz Kairyk Ensemble.

“Jaralysh” (The Origin), a unique concert-performance produced in partnership with UCA’s Cultural Heritage and Humanities Unit (CHHU), thrilled audiences who flocked to Bishkek’s Asanbay Centre on December 23rd 2020. The Kyrgyz Kairyk ensemble, the youth experimental theatre and young designers of Kyrgyzstan, teamed up for this production which explores the birth of a nation through a hero who faces enormous challenges in life.

“Jaralysh” is an initiative of the Kyrgyz Kairyk musical project, which, in partnership with

CHHU, contributes to the preservation and revitalization of Kyrgyz traditional music.

The performance shows the formation of the nation personified by the hero’s performance, who comes to life from stone thanks to a guardian angel. The musical tale unfolds the trials and tribulations of a person who embodies the fate of an entire nation. His path is full of the vicissitudes of life, but with every loss there is gain – the breath of a new life.

Original music for the performance was

composed by a group of young and talented Kyrgyz musicians who participated in the project; Aibek Baiymbetov, Junior Research Fellow at the University of Central Asia, and co-founder of the Kyrgyz Kairyk ensemble, wrote the script.

Along with animation and theatrical presentation, the audience was able to see and hear some of the most ancient Kyrgyz musical instruments, which were reconstructed recently on the basis of folklore information. Due to high demand, there were two showings of the performance.





Madrasah Students Prepare for University Entrance Test at SPCE







Forty students from the Naryn Madrasah began preparing for the University Entrance Test at UCA’s School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPCE). A high score in the test would enable them to choose a university of their choice in Kyrgyzstan (including UCA) with a full scholarship. Twenty boys and twenty girls (photo) began classes from December and are expected to continue until February 2021. The cost is being borne by the University of Central Asia and the Aga Khan Development Network. Acknowledging this gesture, the Qadi of Naryn sent a letter of appreciation to SPCE. Since 2018, in addition to the foregoing, 30 students from the Madrasah have attended English Language courses, and 15 have received training in Information Technology skills at SPCE.

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