



UNIVERSITY  
OF CENTRAL ASIA

# ANNUAL REPORT 2023





## About UCA

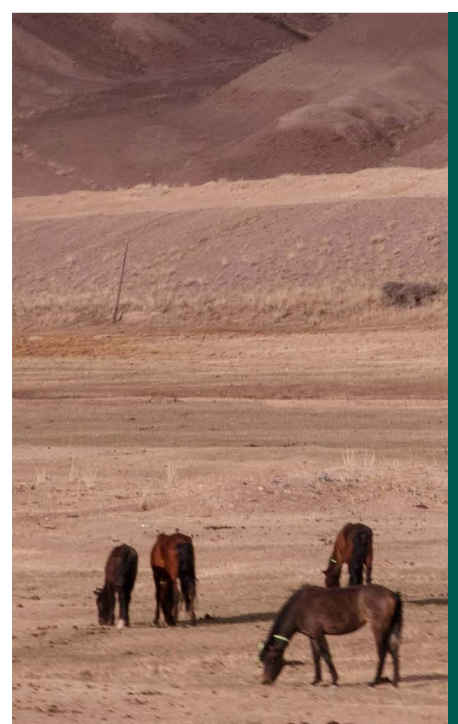
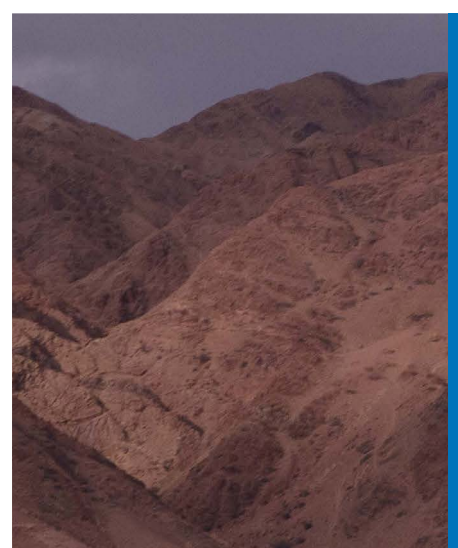
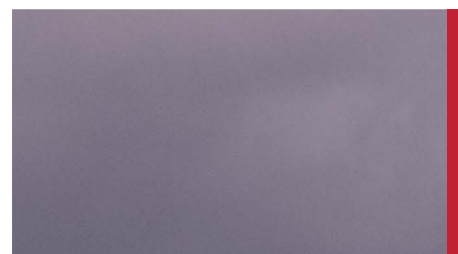
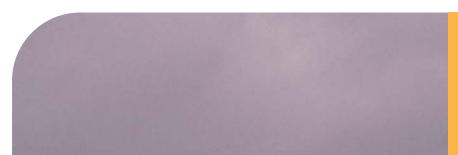
The University of Central Asia (UCA) is one of the world's few regional, internationally chartered, fully residential institutions with a mission to improve the quality of life of mountain societies. It was founded in 2000 as a private, not for profit, secular university through an International Treaty signed by the Presidents of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and His Highness the Aga Khan IV; ratified by their respective parliaments and registered with the United Nations. The Presidents are the Patrons of the University, and His Highness is the Chancellor.

UCA's mission is to promote the social and economic development of Central Asia, particularly its mountain communities, by offering an internationally recognised standard of higher education, and enabling the peoples of the region to preserve their rich cultural heritage as assets for the future.

For more information: [www.ucentralasia.org](http://www.ucentralasia.org)

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## Message from the Chairman

The founding vision of the University of Central Asia (UCA)—to serve the mountain societies of the region through education, research, and outreach—continues to find new and meaningful expression across our three Schools. In 2023, our students, faculty, and partners once again demonstrated how perseverance, creativity, and collaboration can generate impact well beyond our campuses.

At the School of Arts and Sciences, the year combined academic rigour with hands-on experience. Students distinguished themselves at the NASA App Challenge Hackathon and the Docmonde master class, reflecting both ingenuity and global competitiveness. Our third undergraduate cohort graduated, bringing the alumni community to 198—an emerging network now contributing to international organisations, academia, business, and start-ups. The launch of a production studio in Bishkek was an important step in linking classroom learning with industry practice. The 2023 Convocation was especially memorable, with Trustees—including Princess Zahra Aga Khan—and a broad cross-section of donors and volunteers in attendance, underscoring UCA's deep engagement with its supporters.

The Graduate School of Development continued to advance UCA's mission through impactful research and outreach. From new interdisciplinary course materials to the ongoing success of the Life in Kyrgyzstan Conference, the Afghanistan Research Initiative, and the Mountain Societies Research Institute, our programmes informed policy, preserved culture, and supported climate resilience. The Cultural Heritage and Humanities Unit further distinguished itself in showcasing Central Asia's rich heritage through exhibitions, publications, and community-based initiatives.

The School of Professional and Continuing Education surpassed a significant milestone, reaching over 27,000 learners. Its expanding presence—particularly in Afghanistan and underserved areas of the region—reflects our commitment to inclusive access and lifelong learning.

In 2023, UCA also launched its global awareness-raising campaign, completing the North America leg. This included, for the first time, targeted outreach to the Canadian private sector, strengthening our advancement efforts and broadening our international visibility.

Our global partnerships continued to strengthen. The Central Asian Faculty Development Programme enhanced our faculty pipeline, while collaborations with the University of Cambridge and Simon Fraser University created new pathways for students and alumni to pursue world-class academic opportunities. These efforts support UCA's aspiration to be a distinctive regional university with global reach.

We remain deeply grateful for the foresight and leadership of our Chancellor, His Highness the Aga Khan, whose unwavering commitment to education continues to guide and inspire our work. The Board of Trustees, drawing on its regional knowledge and international experience, has provided steadfast support. We are also thankful to our Founding States, partners, and friends who continue to champion this shared endeavour.

I hope this report offers a concise overview of UCA's progress in 2023, as well as our continued commitment to advancing the development of mountain societies through education and research.

*Dr Shamsh Kassim-Lakha*  
*Chairman, Board of Trustees*





## School of Arts and Sciences

The School of Arts and Sciences offers Bachelors Degree programmes with majors in Computer Science, Communications and Media, Global Economics, and Earth and Environmental Sciences at its residential campuses in Khorog and Naryn. Future plans include majors in Engineering Sciences and Business and Management.



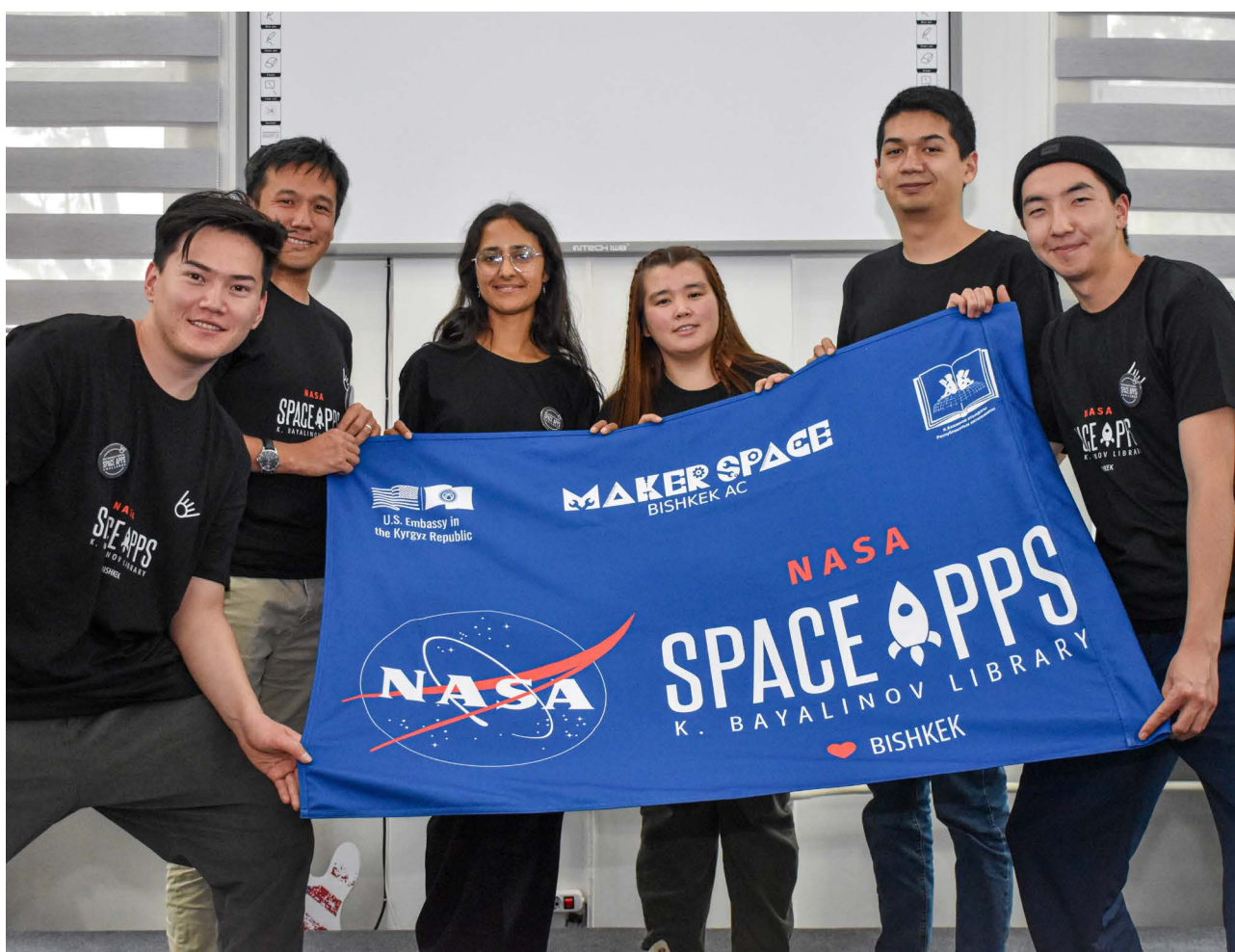
## CELEBRATING STUDENT SUCCESS AT UCA: A BRIGHT FUTURE

Student teams from the University of Central Asia (UCA) took part in the Northern Eurasia Regional Contest (NERC) of the International Collegiate Programming Contest (ICPC) in Astana Kazakhstan, the world's largest and most prestigious programming competition, alongside 44 teams from Kyrgyzstan. The ICPC played a crucial role in identifying and nurturing talent in computer science, offering students opportunities to collaborate with peers and professionals while tackling real-world problem-solving challenges.

UCA students secured second place at the NASA App Challenge Hackathon, held in 2023. In addressing the environmental problem of the shrinking Aral Sea, a team from UCA's Computer Science and Communications & Media departments developed an app proposal to simplify complex data from NASA's EMIT sensor for public use. The app aimed to combine air quality data from Kyrgyzstan with EMIT data to help users understand the impact of dust particles on health and agriculture. The hackathon, which drew around 40 teams from across

Kyrgyzstan, recognised UCA's innovative solution among the top seven entries.

A communications and media student at UCA undertook an inspiring project in the Pamir Mountains, filming a documentary about Sarez Lake with university support. By blending art and science, the student showcased the region's beauty and the stories of its inhabitants. Their initiative attracted interest from various organisations resulting in financial backing. A highlight was being selected for the prestigious Docmonde master class, where their project was one of six chosen from Tajikistan and the only one led by a student. Following an intensive workshop in Dushanbe with renowned French director Vladimir Leon, the student's project was recognised as one of the top two from Tajikistan, earning an invitation to pitch at the Eurasia Coproduction meeting in Almaty, Kazakhstan. This achievement reflects both the student's dedication and UCA's commitment to fostering real-world engagement and professional development.



UCA Computer Science Students Participate in NASA Space Apps Challenge Hackathon



## THE FUTURE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

### UCA Launches Studio at the Ololo Planet

Connecting the world of the classroom to the world of work has never been more important. To facilitate and enable this transition, UCA's School of Arts and Sciences (SAS), opened a production studio at Ololo Planet, Kyrgyzstan's largest co-working space, to serve as a platform for UCA students and alumni to hone their

hard and soft skills through real-world projects. The Ololo Planet Studio will also help UCA's students and alumni connect with a wider community of start-ups and businesses to boost networking and employability opportunities. The Studio will also host visibility and networking events to further build stronger academia-industry linkages.



Dr Soheil Ashrafi, Chair of the Communications and Media department, School of Arts and Sciences, extends a warm welcome to students, alumni, and partners at the soft opening of the Studio.

### Nomad 2023: A Living Land

Nomad 2023: A Living Land, held from 22 to 24 September 2023 at UCA's Naryn Campus, brought together artists, filmmakers, and creatives from across the region to explore the theme of land through film, creative writing, fashion, and art. Highlights included an International Film Festival featuring works from 40+ countries, exhibitions on Kyrgyz nomadic heritage, and workshops on digital art and filmmaking. The event also featured a fashion show inspired by Chingiz Aitmatov's *White Ship* and live performances of Kyrgyz folklore music. The festival fostered cultural exchange, promoted tourism, and raised awareness about sustainable development and environmental conservation in mountain regions.

### Centre for Teaching, Learning & Technology

In 2023, the Centre for Teaching, Learning and Technology (CTLT) expanded its support to all three UCA schools.

Demonstrating its commitment to enhancing educational quality, CTLT focused on professional development for UCA instructors and advancing digital learning initiatives. A key achievement was the successful delivery of a Canadian-certified Instructional Skills Workshop, conducted both in person at the Naryn campus and online, marking a significant milestone in its capacity-building efforts. Additionally, CTLT developed its own professional development courses, emphasising active learning, course design, lesson planning, and the learning sciences, reflecting the centre's growing expertise. Digital learning remained a priority, with efforts to enhance e-learning, support online course design, and explore the role of AI in education. UCA collaborated with the Aga Khan University (AKU) to co-facilitate a professional development event at UCA, while CTLT also participated in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Conference at AKU in October 2023.



## Co-operative Education Programme

In 2023, UCA's Co-operative Education Programme expanded its internship offerings announcing 436 opportunities, with 414 successfully completed by 190 students. These internships included on-campus roles such as Teaching and Research Assistants, as well as placements in organisations like the Aga Khan Development Network, World Food Programme, and UNICEF. Career networking events in Bishkek and Dushanbe attracted over 300 participants, facilitating connections with industry experts. The programme also provided several international exchange opportunities:

- *One student* participated in the Erasmus+ Learning Mobility Programme, spending a semester at the University of South-Eastern Norway.
- *Multiple students* were selected for international internships through UCA's existing partnerships, including participation in the World Bank's climate action project.
- *Four students* were selected for the SUSI Albright Young Women Leaders Program in the United States.
- *Other students* engaged in global summer camps and exchange programmes, enhancing their international exposure, and learning experience.

## UCA'S GROWING ALUMNI NETWORK AND GLOBAL IMPACT

### Alumni Statistics

In 2023, UCA's School of Arts and Sciences (SAS) celebrated the graduation of its third cohort. These alumni join UCA's growing alumni network of **198** individuals. Employment Status:



**133 alumni (67%)**  
have secured employment.



**44 alumni (22%)**  
are pursuing graduate degrees.



**17 alumni (9%)**  
are exploring job opportunities or applying to graduate programs.



**4 alumni (2%)**  
are studying and working.

Of those graduates seeking employment, many have embraced online opportunities in the fields of English, Math, and IT education.



Mehrangez Saidmamadova filming Sarez Lake, hidden in the depths of the Pamir mountains



## Student Exchanges

UCA's Communications and Media department accelerated its partnership efforts, with the University of Alberta's School of Communications and Technology.



**10 students from** University of Alberta took courses like Science Communication and Political Communication at UCA.

**5 UCA students** took the course New Media and Narrative at the University of Alberta.

This online exchange experience was a great success and provided encouragement to explore further the potential of digital technology in learning across institutions and continents.



UCA students and Dr Soheil Ashrafi, faculty supervisor, Glasgow School of Art's Winter School

UCA students from various majors also participated in the Glasgow School of Art's (GSA) Winter School 2024, held at the GSA's Altyre Campus. The Winter School brought together students and faculty for design-led, place-based learning under the theme "Soil, Care and Place" emphasizing socially and environmentally conscious research in response to digital and climate changes. Alongside the event, UCA and GSA signed a Memorandum of Understanding to enhance collaboration in research and education.

## Alumni Contribution

UCA's alumni are making significant contributions across diverse sectors globally:

**Involvement in AKDN Agencies:** Nine alumni are engaged with organisations such as the Mountain Societies Development Support Programme (MSDSP), Aga Khan Agency for Habitat, Aga Khan Foundation, and Aga Khan Health Services.

**Employment at UCA:** 13 alumni now work at UCA, as Visiting Faculty in Mathematics, Research Assistants, and Communications Officers, as well as positions in Finance, IT, and APA departments through the Fast Track Professional Development Programme (7 alumni). Other alumni have found success in various fields:

**International Organisations:** Many alumni work with international organisations, including the World Food Programme (WFP), UNHCR, UNICEF, GIZ, ACTED, the World Bank, HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation, the EU Delegation to Tajikistan, and the OSCE.

**The Corporate Sector:** UCA's alumni also work for companies like Coca-Cola, Air Arabia, Air Astana, Yandex, and Uber.

**Entrepreneurial Success:** UCA's alumni have also shown a strong entrepreneurial spirit, many have founded companies,

some have joined incubators and labs, while others have established their careers in tech companies like TECH, d8a.ai, Spalmalo LLC, 4Tale Production, Ophtherium Labs, Ilmhona, and Khumo. UCA's alumni work around the globe, in countries like Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Georgia, Japan, the UAE, Hungary, and the USA.







The Research Lead at UCA's School of Arts and Sciences Research Cluster - Modernity in Central Asia: Identity, Society, Environment, Prof Peter Wagner, delivering public lecture in UCA, Naryn campus

### **Publications and Conferences**

In 2023, the UCA's School of Arts and Sciences made significant strides in academic engagement, through hosting various workshops and conferences.

The Workshop on Modern Data Processing took place on 5-10 October in Khorog, attracting participants from Tajikistan and beyond. This event focused on Geographic Information Systems (GIS), Python applications, and hands-on fieldwork in the Pamir Mountains.

The Second International Scientific and Practical Conference on Tajik Geology was held on 9 December and was co-organised by UCA and the Mining-Metallurgical Institute, bringing together over 100 participants. This conference resulted in the publication of numerous research papers in the Journal of Geology and Oil and Gas, showcasing the department's commitment to advancing geological research.

UCA's Earth and Environmental Sciences (EES) faculty completed several research projects, with a total of 12 publications in high-ranking journals. Notable articles include studies on igneous rocks and ongoing research utilising machine learning for yield prediction and air pollution assessment in the Sughd region, Tajikistan.

UCA faculty also represented the university at prominent international conferences, with presentations by Jovid Aminov at the European Geosciences Union (EGU) Conference in Austria, Mohssen Moazzen in Japan, and Mukesh Boori at the International Trends in Natural Sciences and Technology (ITNT) Conference in Russia.

Under the Modernity in Central Asia: Identity, Society, Environment research cluster, a key conference, Post-Imperial Constellations: Society, Identity, Environment, was held from 7 to 9 November 2023. Launched at UCA in 2022, this post-imperial perspective is a growing research area that brings together experts from fields traditionally focused on Persian, Ottoman, Russian, British, and Chinese empires to examine post-imperial dynamics in Central Asia. Keynote speakers included Said Amir Arjomand (Stoney Brook University), Karen Barkey (Bard College), Alexander Etkind (Central European University), Alexander Semyenov (Higher School of Economics), Peter Wagner (University of Barcelona), and Wang Hui (Tsinghua University). The conference established long-term partnerships with leading scholars, and enhanced UCA's international research visibility with participation from faculty in Naryn and Khorog.

UCA's Khorog campus hosted its first international workshop, Modern Data Processing Techniques for Natural Hazards in Mountainous Environments, on 5-10 October 2023. The workshop provided an in-depth exploration of key topics, including flood analysis using GIS and Python, landslide and slope stability assessment, susceptibility mapping, and environmental risk evaluation. Experts also discussed earth and space science applications for natural resource management, long-term snow avalanche monitoring, and the spatial and temporal dynamics of ecological systems. In addition to three days of intensive theoretical sessions, participants took part in two days of fieldwork at natural hazard sites in the Pamir Mountains, gaining hands-on experience in data collection and analysis.





## Graduate School of Development

The Graduate School of Development (GSD) is the home for multidisciplinary research on Central Asia's social, economic, and cultural development. GSD is comprised of six divisions, each of which has achieved a significant presence in the Central Asian knowledge landscape. These include the Institute of Public Policy and Administration, the Mountain Society Research Institute, the Cultural Heritage and Humanities Unit, the Civil Society Initiative, the Aga Khan Humanities Project, and the Afghanistan Research Initiative.





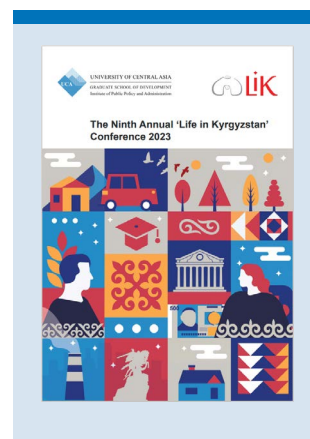
# Institute for Public Policy and Administration

This year, IPPA successfully hosted the 9th Annual Life in Kyrgyzstan Conference (LiK), which addressed a wide range of socio-economic issues and gathering over 75 expert speakers. The first round of the International Economics Olympiad saw enthusiastic participation from students across Kyrgyzstan, promoting financial and economic literacy among young people. IPPA's dedication to fostering informed decision making and sustainable progress was visible through its enhanced civil servant digital skill training programmes and through its SIPA Summer School and Food Self-Sufficiency Study.

## Annual Life in Kyrgyzstan Conference

From 12 to 13 October 2023, IPPA in partnership with the International Security and Development Center, the Leibniz Institute of Vegetable and Ornamental Crops, the World Bank, UNFPA, American University of Central Asia, and Mercy Corps, hosted the 9th Annual Life in Kyrgyzstan (LiK) Conference. The conference featured a wide range of topics, including entrepreneurship, civil society, green economy, air pollution, women's representation, agriculture, human mobility, and digital transformation. High-ranking officials and experts from various institutions participated in six expert sessions, fifteen panel sessions and two plenary sessions with keynote speeches by Dr Michelle Brock and UCA's Dr Arnaud Caiserman. The conference gathered over 75 speakers in 23 thematic sessions on socio-economic developments in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia.

Photo: Food Self-Sufficiency Workshop by IPPA and FAO Sub-regional Office for Central Asia workshop marked the culmination of a comprehensive study on Food Self-Sufficiency in Central Asia and the Caucasus.



The Ninth Annual 'Life in Kyrgyzstan' Conference 2023 Report



## International Economics Olympiad

IPPA, in partnership with the Economic Fundamentals Initiative, also conducted the first round of the International Economics Olympiad for students in private and public schools across Kyrgyzstan. This Olympiad is one of the main components of a global Economic Literacy project. A total of 1680 students from 102 registered schools participated in the first round, which was conducted online. The test was conducted in three languages: Kyrgyz, Russian, and English, with a maximum score of 25. The highest score in Kyrgyzstan was 23, and 54 students passed to the 2nd round. The five winners of the final round represented Kyrgyzstan in the final stage of the Olympiad along with finalists from 15 countries in Bratislava, Slovakia in September 2023.



Winners of the International Economics Olympiad

## Building Capacity of Public Servants and Creating an Enabling Environment for the Digital Economy

IPPA, in collaboration with UCA's School of Professional and Continuing Education and Computer Science department has been a key contributor in ensuring civil servants from the Kyrgyz Republic are well positioned to take advantage of the world's digital economy. As the world undergoes a digital transformation, workers and civil servants must be equipped with the digital tools to thrive and succeed.

IPPA has implemented a component of the Digital CASA - Kyrgyz Republic Project under the Ministry of Digital Development of the Kyrgyz Republic. The training programme, launched in February 2023, aimed to enhance digital skills among civil servants through free training provision for 1,845 civil servants, 64% of

whom were women, on topics such as Microsoft Office, data analysis, data privacy, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and others.

Two hundred civil servants, who completed the training successfully, took the International Computer Driving License (ICDL) certification which sponsored by the project. ICDL is an internationally recognized certification which provides evidence that an individual possesses the skills in a variety of ICT topics.

Under the project, UCA has delivered three offline training courses, including a two-day training for the staff from Jogorku Kenesh (Parliament) of the Kyrgyz Republic, in May 2023. After successful delivery of the project, the Ministry of Digital Development and UCA signed an MoU committing to working together within future projects.



Graduates of the ICT training programme proudly displaying their certificates of completion



## The Second SIPA Summer School 2023

The 2023 Sustainable Infrastructure Programme in Asia (SIPA) Summer School, was organised jointly by the OECD and IPPA and took place in October in Istanbul, Türkiye. SIPA brought together 26 policymakers from national development and planning authorities, ministries and agencies from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, as well as other SIPA implementation partners and experts on sustainable infrastructure. Participants shared policy experience and disseminated best practice and knowledge in tackling challenges regarding sustainable transport infrastructure planning and financing within the context of climate change and development challenges. IPPA also held online training on Policy Brief Writing that brought together 11 experts from Central Asian countries, with 3 of them winning the Best Policy Brief Competition. IPPA also hosted 2 SIPA webinars on Decarbonisation of Transport in Central Asia, and on Decarbonisation of Energy in Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Mongolia.



SIPA Summer School participants engaging in the discussion on policies for transport decarbonisation

## Food Self-Sufficiency Study in Central Asia and the Caucasus

In December 2023, two online webinars were conducted as part of the FAO project Food Self-Sufficiency Study in Central Asia and the Caucasus. The Food Self-Sufficiency Workshop, hosted in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan by IPPA in collaboration with the United Nations's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), marked the culmination of a comprehensive study on food self-sufficiency in Central Asia and the Caucasus conducted by UCA.



Life in Kyrgyzstan Conference Panel





## Mountain Societies Research Institute

The Mountain Societies Research Institute (MSRI) applies sound scientific expertise to study complex earth surface and environmental processes and interactions that affect mountain societies. Its interdisciplinary research focuses on improving mountain livelihoods, sustainably managing natural resources, mitigating the effects of natural hazards and climate change, and building community resilience in these challenging environments.

In 2023, the Mountain Societies Research Institute contributed to development across the GBAO region, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. The work of MSRI included the THRIVE project, which focused on enhancing agricultural productivity through the trial of new crop varieties, as well as supporting local livelihoods through yak production initiatives. MSRI also advanced the use of remote sensing and GIS technologies, training local stakeholders in environmental monitoring and hazard assessment. In Kyrgyzstan, MSRI's research on forest ecosystems and climate change adaptation has led to valuable insights, while involvement in capacity-building projects has strengthened the region's resilience to environmental challenges.



## **THRIVE Project**

MSRI led comprehensive research between 2022 and 2023 in GBAO, including the THRIVE project, which aims to address the pressing challenges of limited space and low agricultural yields. Recognising the necessity for more productive and disease-resistant crop varieties, MSRI conducted extensive trials across South Central Asia, focusing on wheat strains sourced from Tajikistan, China, and Pakistan. The trial's findings highlighted the significance of local varieties in boasting increased grain production, robust spikelets, and tillers, alongside longer straw suitable for cattle fodder. To optimise agricultural outcomes, MSRI advocated for the crossbreeding of indigenous and foreign cultivars, thereby enhancing resilience and yield potential. MSRI's initiatives also included making recommendations for wheat variety trials and crop selection. In collaboration with the Pamir Botanical Garden, MSRI supported yak production in the Eastern Pamir region through strategic inseminations with robust yak species, enriching local livelihoods and promoting biodiversity conservation.

## **Capacity Building and Training Programmes**

MSRI plays an important role in developing local capacity through its training programmes. In one example MSRI led training funded by the World Bank on MSRI's own Snow Avalanches Frequency Estimation (SAFE) tool, developed by Dr Arnaud Caiserman. Twenty participants from Tajikistan's agencies and academic institutions attended the programme which focused on avalanche risk assessment for the Labidjar-Karamik road. MSRI identified over 50 high-risk sections for potential safety measures. Participants successfully learned how to utilise SAFE, further enhancing Tajikistan's hazard monitoring capabilities and road safety efforts. MSRI provided further training on the SAFE script and equipped key stakeholders such as the Committee of Emergency Situations, Pamir Energy, and the Aga Khan Agency for Habitat with the skills to map snow avalanche deposits and create frequency and vulnerability maps, essential for guiding urban planning and infrastructure prioritisation.

Since late 2023, MSRI has been involved in a capacity-building project funded by the UNDP and the Green Climate Fund. This project supports Tajikistan's efforts to implement its National Climate Change Adaptation Strategy and Nationally Determined Contributions. The initiative, led by UNDP in collaboration with UCA and the Agency for Hydrometeorology, focuses on improving governance and coordination for climate adaptation in line with Tajikistan's development policies. High-level training is being provided to government staff from key

sectors such as energy, water, agriculture, transport, and forestry. MSRI is also developing a curriculum for a master's programme in Climate Change and Mountain Environments, using the UNDP project as a testing ground to tailor the curriculum to national needs in resilience and climate change adaptation.

## **Forest Ecosystems Research**

MSRI made substantial contributions in Kyrgyzstan through research and academic initiatives, such as research on forest ecosystems in the Jalal-Adad province using GIS, remote sensing technologies, and UAV for high-resolution forest mapping. This research led to several peer-reviewed publications, with plans to expand the research to riparian forests in Naryn province. MSRI also conducted socio-economic research on the use of walnut-fruit forests by local communities in Jalal-Abad province, revealing the impact of income generation strategies on natural resources and livelihoods. Similar research is now being conducted in Naryn province, which focuses on the impact of climate change on local communities, particularly women. Moreover, research on socio-economic aspects of the walnut-fruit forests using by local communities in Jalal-Abad province of Kyrgyzstan revealed both the different types of strategies local communities use for income generation, and diversification and impact these strategies have on natural resources and livelihood.

## **Natural Hazards Modelling and Disaster Risk Management**

MSRI collaborated with the Ministry of Emergency Situations (MES) in Kyrgyzstan on natural hazards modelling and disaster risk management, providing a series of training programmes on debris flow modelling, contributing to the hazard monitoring and forecasting efforts under an existing MoU with MES. MSRI is also working on joint publications with the Institute of Water Problems and the Tien Shan Scientific Centre of the Kyrgyz National Academy of Sciences, focusing on topics such as the development of high mountain hazardous lakes and cryospheric hazards.

## **Community Adaptation**

MSRI has also played a key role in increasing community resilience and adaptation through the development of training modules on climate change, natural hazards, and mitigation strategies, which will increase awareness among state employees in Naryn province. The first training of trainers was completed in May 2023, with participants from Bishkek and Naryn being trained to deliver the full course to state employees.





## Cultural Heritage and Humanities Unit

In 2023, the Cultural Heritage and Humanities Unit (CHHU) achieved significant milestones in promoting and preserving the rich cultural heritage of Central Asia. CHHU played a pivotal role in organising and hosting major cultural events, including the international festival “Nomad 2023: A Living Land” and an exhibition at the National History Museum of the Kyrgyz Republic. These events showcased the region's vibrant artistic and historical legacy. CHHU also secured a grant to develop rural museums, and conducted educational programmes which nurture young musicians and artists.

### Nomad 2023: A Living Land

CHHU organised a series of cultural events as part of the international festival “Nomad 2023: A Living Land,” held at UCA’s Naryn campus. CHHU brought together young and professional musicians, artists, and designers from Bishkek to enrich the programme with unique exhibitions, concerts, and fashion shows, highlighting the creativity and cultural diversity of Central Asia.

### Exhibition on Historical Military Armor

CHHU hosted an exhibition at the National History Museum of the Kyrgyz Republic in Bishkek, showcasing the first-ever professional historical reconstruction of ancient and medieval military armour worn by Kyrgyz warriors. The exhibition, which ran from September to October 2023, was a collaborative effort involving young researchers, technology engineers, designers, and leading archaeologists, historians, and ethnographers from Kyrgyzstan and abroad.

Photo: Kyrgyzstan’s First National Museum Festival, “Local Stories in Museum Spaces” at the Sulaiman-Too Museum in Osh.



## Major Publications

In December 2023, CHHU published the fifth volume of the Pamiri Folklore Series, titled "The Fairy Tales of Badakhshan." This beautifully designed book, available in local Pamiri, Tajik, Russian, and English, is a collaborative project with the Institute of Humanities of the National Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan. In November 2023, CHHU contributed to the publication of a new book titled *Heritage and Identity in the Turkic World*, published by DeGruyter in Germany. Dr Elmira Kochumkulova, former Director of CHHU, served as a co-editor and contributor to the book, which presents contemporary scholarship in Central Asian Studies and is dedicated to the memory of Professor Ilse Laude Cirtautas.

## Grants and Funding

CHHU was awarded a grant of approximately \$150,000 USD from the Swiss Embassy in Bishkek for a project aimed at developing rural museums in Kyrgyzstan. The three-year project will focus on enhancing the skills of museum specialists and will include training sessions, mini-grants for museums, and a national museum festival.

## Educational Initiatives

In April 2023, CHHU organised a series of musical and educational training programmes called "Jash

Kayryk" in Batken, Osh, and Jalal-Abad regions. The programme, designed to develop the creative and professional potential of young musicians and teachers, was implemented in collaboration with the "Kyrgyz Kairyk" musical project and supported by the Ministry of Culture, Information, Sports, and Youth Policy of the Kyrgyz Republic.

## First National Museum Festival

CHHU, in partnership with Kyrgyzstan's Ministry of Culture and the University of Durham, organised Kyrgyzstan's First National Museum Festival, "Local Stories in Museum Spaces" at the Sulaiman-Too Museum in Osh. The event recognised the importance of community engagement in museum content creation and rewarded 10 museums for their outstanding contributions.

## Cultural Preservation

CHHU co-hosted an exhibition of traditional arts as part of the "Bashat" (Origins) scholarship programme. The exhibition showcased works from 10 young Kyrgyz artists and featured reconstructed armour from an ancient warrior nomad. The initiative was supported by the World Union of Indigenous Spiritual Practitioners (WUISP), the Arga Bilig Association, the Rural Development Fund, and UCA



Armour of the 9th century Kyrgyz warrior





## The Civil Society Initiative

In 2023, the Civil Society Initiative (CSI) made significant strides in advancing gender advocacy, research, and civil society engagement in Central Asia. The completion of the second cycle of the SAGE training programme saw 53 participants from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan deepen their expertise in gender advocacy across multiple thematic areas. The programme also supported eight gender advocacy projects through its Small Grants Component. CSI contributed to the academic landscape with a systematic literature review on civil society in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and facilitated knowledge-sharing at forums and conferences

### SAGE Training Programme (Second Cycle)

In 2023, CSI successfully completed the second cycle of the SAGE training programme. This Online Advanced Gender Advocacy Programme was attended by 53 participants from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

The 13-week programme covered over 10 thematic areas, tailored to the specific interests of the participants. The curriculum emphasised an ecosystem-based approach to gender advocacy, career development in gender advocacy, and institutional readiness. The programme also incorporated elements of Training of Trainers (ToT), sector-specific gender advocacy tools, research, and data-driven policy development. Expert speakers from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Poland, and Austria contributed to the program.

The SAGE Small Grants Component also supported

eight gender advocacy projects from the second cohort. These projects addressed legal support for gender equality in Northern Tajikistan, economic and educational opportunities, gender equity in water management, women's property rights, and women's entrepreneurship. The projects' products, like videos, policy recommendations, and manuals, were presented to local authorities, state bodies, and civil society organizations (CSOs).

CSI also hosted the SAGE Regional Forum in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The forum brought together 40 participants from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and featured six speakers from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and the UK. The main objective of the forum was to strengthen the Community of Practice (CoP) among gender advocates and to facilitate knowledge exchange on a wide range of gender advocacy issues.



## Research and Knowledge Dissemination Initiatives

Throughout 2023, CSI engaged in various research and knowledge dissemination initiatives. This included facilitating a webinar on gender equality and non-discrimination, participating in the ESCAS Regional Conference with a presentation on social mobilisation in Kyrgyzstan, and conducting a survey on women-led NGOs in the country.

CSI also organised a panel discussion on the changing dynamics of civil society in Central Asia at the "Life in Kyrgyzstan" conference and delivered an online presentation on philanthropy in Central Asia at a UNFPA workshop.

CSI launched a training programme on research methodologies in partnership with Naryn State University, resulting in 10 selected research projects. CSI also delivered a public lecture on gender-based violence as part of the "16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence" campaign.

CSI completed and presented a systematic literature review on civil society in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, covering the period from the 1990s to the present. The review, conducted by Medet Tiulegenov and Nargis Kochakshoeva, was presented at two round tables attended by over 40 representatives of CSOs and academia.







## Aga Khan Humanities Project

In 2023 AKHP established itself as a leader in humanities education in Central Asia through the establishment of its digital platform, the release of several newly revised editions and translations in four different languages its “Introduction to the Humanities” anthology. AKHP’s Digital Platform, is a new virtual space for exchanging information between UCA’s vibrant community of academics, educators, students and researchers across the Central Asian region. Spanning borders the online interactive platform allows for knowledge sharing and production and has transformed the way educators and students interact with curriculum materials and professional development opportunities. AKHP continues to enhance educational quality and cultural understanding in the region, through landmark events like its summer school, in partnership with the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), and the 3rd Annual International AKHP Conference.

### Introduction to the Humanities Anthology

The newly revised edition and translations of AKHP’s ‘Introduction to the Humanities’ anthology was published in Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik and Russian. It is one of the eight interdisciplinary course books, that will soon sit alongside two new editions on Women in Central Asia and on Climate Change in Central Asia as part of current humanities course material taught by AKHP trainers in more than 60 academic institutions across Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. This new edition consists of six updated chapters, where six new texts were added. The Russian version of a second anthology Individual and Society was updated, underwent peer-review and soon be renewed and translated into four languages.



AKHP’s Introduction to Humanity Anthology, translated into Russian, Tajik, and Kyrgyz



### Launch of the AKHP Digital Platform

AKHP's [Digital Platform](#) was launched in February 2023 and provides a virtual space for curriculum materials, supplementary learning resources, and professional development in four languages. The platform hosts the AKHP curriculum materials and supplementary learning resources including an interactive map of Central Asia developed by AKHP. This interactive digital platform serves as a forum for discussing ideas regarding existing and new courses, and as online repository of relevant research, as well as a platform of virtual professional development opportunities.

### AKHP Summer School

AKHP conducted a three-week summer school programme entitled: *Tajik, Dari or Persian: The Evolution of the Persian Languages and Cultures* for 25 undergraduate students from Germany funded by DAAD. The programme included crash courses in Tajik, Persian and Eastern Iranian languages, Persian classical texts sessions, as well as discussions and debates on Persian and Tajik history and literature. The programme included and excursions to Dushanbe's museums and historical sites.

### Tajik-Persian Language Course

AKHP, in partnership with the University of Oxford, conducted a 16-week Tajik-Persian language course for undergraduate students from Oxford's Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies in Dushanbe. Qualified teachers from various Tajik universities taught courses on Persian-Tajik grammar, reading and writing, the basics of Tajik language and literature, and explored Tajik-Persian linguistic and cultural heritage, as well as the Persian and Tajik scripts.

### Debate Club's 11th Anniversary

The AKHP Debate Club celebrated its 11th anniversary by organising the republican championship. Since its establishment in 2012, the Debate Club through its weekly debate sessions and training, nurtured successful debaters

and prosperous young leaders in different parts of Central Asia. This time 40 of the best young debaters gathered in Dushanbe to debate issues such as, the prioritisation of funds for space exploration over combatting poverty and inequality, the current devaluation of higher education by young people, and the fight against climate change and global warming.

### Third AKHP Annual International Conference

AKHP convened its Third Annual International Conference entitled "Teaching Humanities in the Context of Central Asia: New Approaches, Processes, and Methodologies" in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. The conference fostered collaboration among AKHP partner universities across Central Asia and beyond, with a focus on exploring innovation in humanities education. Distinguished speakers, including representatives from educational authorities in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, as well as renowned scholars from Canada and the United States, shared valuable insights and perspectives.

### Documentary Film

AKHP, in collaboration with Tajik National TV, filmed a documentary entitled '[Tajik Cultural Heritage along the Wakhan Route of the Silk Road](#)' in the Ishkashim district of Gorno Badakshan Autonomous Oblast, Tajikistan. The film crew travelled from Dushanbe to Khorog and further on to the Wakhan valley to record the region's ancient monuments associated with the famous Silk Road, including caravansaries, fortresses, arrow towers, temples, petroglyphs, and other historical artefacts. The film was presented at the Ismaili Centre Dushanbe and broadcasted on several Tajik TV channels.

### Online Public Lecture Series

In 2023 AKHP conducted 8 online public lectures on various themes related to humanities and social science presented by scholars from Central Asia and beyond.



The Langar petroglyphs – one of biggest ancient sites in Central Asia, a part of AKHP's and Tajik National TV Documentary





## Afghanistan Research Initiative

The Afghanistan Research Initiative (ARI) launched in 2022 with funding from Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the Aga Khan Foundation Canada, was established to sustain the research and produce knowledge critical to the country's present and future. ARI fosters the development of an intellectual diaspora, with the aspiration to mitigate drain of talent and intellectual capacity by sustaining knowledge creation and engagement with Afghanistan. The ARI does this through a combination of doctoral research grants and non-resident research fellowships, a public lecture series aimed at dissemination of new knowledge and creating a community of practice, a graduate studies preparatory programme which in 2023 served 34 students (15 women) and information dissemination through a newsletter. In 2023, ARI supported 16 PhD students in universities across Europe, India, Malaysia, and Turkey and awarded grants to 17 Afghan scholars working in various fields, including social sciences, humanities, gender studies, and environmental sciences. ARI also provided non-resident research fellowships to four Afghan scholars.





Photo: Dr Marzhan Aikimbaeva teaching Afghan students





## School of Professional and Continuing Education

The School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPCE) celebrated its 17th anniversary in 2023 and has remained a leading provider of post-secondary, short-cycle continuing education in Central Asia and Afghanistan. Since its establishment, SPCE has engaged 242,297 learners in 16 learning centres across Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Afghanistan where young learners, teenagers, and adults are provided professional and vocational training and qualification in a flexible format that boost skills development and capacity building for further employment, job creation and educational mobility.



## SPCE in 2023

One of the key elements of SPCE 2025 Strategy is to diversify the online courses and improve qualifications for employment by generating new jobs and reaching marginalized learners. The school is unique continuously adjusts its programmes and educational practices while responding to the needs and opportunities of the local communities. SPCE's Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programme promotes employment opportunities. Programmes and courses on business and entrepreneurship allow graduates to create a source of income for themselves and launch their own enterprises.

## SPCE Enrolment Update: Programmes and Statistics

In 2023 SPCE boosted its enrolment to 27,056 students representing a 9.3% increase over its 2022 enrolment (25,341). The school offers internationally benchmarked training and certificate programmes in accounting; business management, applied languages, IT, university preparatory programme and Mathematics in English for primary school children; local governance; public administration; vocational and executive training. Courses are delivered in online and in-person modular, short-cycle, flexible learning formats to accommodate learners with different backgrounds.

For SPCE in Tajikistan that is 1,410 learners in Bokhtar, 6,368 in Dushanbe, Guliston and Merve, 3,333 in Khorog, and 805 in Khujand. Kyrgyzstan's performance in enrollment is also significant, that is 2,958 learners in Naryn SPCE and 1,556 in Bishkek learning centre. The whooping number of 9,742 admitted learners goes to Afghanistan, that is 4,342 learners in two locations in Faizabad, 2,012 in Kabul, 1,618 in Ishkashim and 1,770 in Shughnan learning centres. Compared to 2022, this year Kazakhstan doubled its enrollment by admitting 766 people. In 2023, Afghanistan relocated Darwaz learning centre to Kabul that helped to increase enrolment of the Kabul learning centre. SPCE has been actively working on opening a new location in Taldykorgan city that is a prospective and promising market for SPCE.

### Developing SPCE's 2025 Strategy

SPCE's 2025 Strategy is centred around five pillars:

1. Digitally Native SPCE;
2. Entrepreneurship;
3. Reaching Marginalized Learners;
4. Financial Sustainability; and
5. Quality Assurance.

Enrolment by Programme		
Programme	# Students	%
Short-Term Courses	9,349	34.6%
Short-Term Programmes	8,214	30.3%
International Projects	7,860	29%
Seminars	953	3.5%
Professional Development	250	0.9%
Certificate Programmes	245	0.9%
TVET	115	0.4%
Outreach Programmes	70	0.3%
Total Enrolment 27,056		

Enrolment by Location		
Country	# Students	%
Tajikistan	11,916	44.2%
Afghanistan	9,742	36.2%
Kyrgyzstan	4,514	16.7%
Kazakhstan	766	2.8%
Total Enrolment 26,938		

Female Enrolment by Location	
Country	Students
Kazakhstan	80%
Kyrgyzstan	74%
Tajikistan	49%
Afghanistan	26%
Overall female enrolment across all four countries: 57%	



Students of SPCE's Academic Achievement Programme, Naryn, Kyrgyzstan





Aikanish Taalaibekova launched a successful guest house in Naryn, Kyrgyzstan upon graduating from SPCE's Entrepreneurship Programme.

### 1. Digitally Native SPCE

SPCE has been at the forefront introducing digital technologies in teaching and learning. SPCE envisions a future in which all its courses would be available through SPCE's own Learning Management System (LMS), allowing universal access to all courses for all learners across the region. Staff would be trained in best practice in online and hybrid teaching and learning pedagogy while working with new technology and digital learning platforms. Student services like registration, attendance, grading, certification, payment, etc. would be handled through a digital platform, which would also allow for virtual monitoring and evaluation.

### 2. Entrepreneurship

SPCE will focus on job creation, the development and promotion of entrepreneurship, and enhance business creation and acceleration. This will be accomplished through the creation of Incubation Centres, Business Acceleration programmes and enhancing the existing TVET programmes. The first Incubation Centre will be piloted in Naryn and then in Khorog. These Centres will serve as experiential development platforms for budding entrepreneurs formalizing the process of identifying, developing and facilitating passionate startup founders. The objectives are to encourage and enhance enterprise culture among young and dynamic professionals of the region and facilitate the creation of job creators rather than job seekers. In partnership with Accelerate Prosperity, SPCE's Business Acceleration programme will help existing businesses develop ideas and provide them with access to funding, specialised talent, and other market research. The programme will leverage entrepreneurial thinking to influence existing traditional decision-making processes, communication

methodologies, management, business planning and financing practices.

SPCE's future aspirations include expanding the existing enrolment of its trade cohorts in construction, carpentry, plumbing, metal working and automotive mechanics. However expanded laboratories need financial support and ensuring full employment of the trade graduates requires demand from local organisations, which necessitate expanding our local agreements. SPCE is working to establish a graduate level of these trades which will require both an upgrade of teaching facilities, additional instructors and upgraded teacher qualification. The aspiration is for SPCE to enrol 504 apprentices in 2024, compared to its enrolment of 128 in 2020. SPCE will also deliver high voltage line maintenance as well as electricity transmission and generation training, within a transnational TVET framework.

### 3. Reaching Marginalized Learners

SPCE serves communities in some of the most disadvantaged and distressed regions of the world. Online education while important and key priority, is not a practical solution for most people in these regions given the geographic isolation and the lack of physical infrastructure. The significant demand for SPCE programmes in these can only be met through physical travel of learners to locations providing online or face-to-face education. This requires that SPCE increase its outreach nodes and provide dormitories to allow the most marginalized segments of society to benefit from its programmes. An expansion of space and dormitory in Khorog, together with opening of regional centres in all four countries is an important first step. SPCE also plans to establish nodes in Osh, Almaty, Khujand, and Kabul. The re-establishment of SPCE's older programmes such as "English in the Villages," will also facilitate the development of young talent from remote villages, where educational levels and quality of teaching are declining. SPCE will also explore the use of technology to facilitate remote learners through the ability of asynchronous platforms for knowledge acquisition. Low-cost smart phones and tablets may provide a mechanism to spread high quality education to the furthest regions. The Center for Teaching, Learning and Technology, will play a key role in the realization of these ambitious objectives.

### 4. Financial Sustainability

SPCE continues its journey towards financial sustainability and ensuring that its operations both meet the needs of students. The implementation of SAP will allow SPCE to ascertain business viability of



each course being offered at each location. This real time information and reports will be incorporated into a business model that minimises losses, maximises response to demand of learners and allows adaptable programming. SPCE will build the capacity of its Master Trainers to introduce its many certificate programmes over the next 5 years. Examination Centres will operate in the capital cities as well as towns where SPCE operates. SPCE has undertaken a cost analysis of all additional programmes to understand the financial requirements for the project's implementation. The enhanced focus on cost recovery of, together with online programming will help ensure SPCE reaches a sustainable business model by 2024.

## 5. Quality Assurance

Ensuring the high quality of programming remains one of SPCE's key distinguishing features and a primary reason behind its success. SPCE has established multilevel control over the performance of each of its location enabling management to soon manage the ever-increasing number of SPCE Centres and learners in real time. Part of this work, along with regular market and alumni surveys, will provide a sound rationale and evidence base for future interventions and programming. SPCE has also developed tools based on Four Disciplines of Execution (4Dx) Methodology with a focus on quantifiable goals monitoring.

Cutting and sewing course at SPCE's Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Centre in Khorog, Tajikistan





## SPCE 2023: Celebrating Major Achievements

SPCE's enrolment of 27,056 was its highest number in its history, largely a result of both the opening of new learning centres in Khujand and Kulob, and 9,000 learners enrolled in 15 new programmes developed and launched in Afghanistan. SPCE has established its position as a leading post-secondary institution, and this year saw some selected major accomplishments across its four countries of operation in the following areas:



### Entrepreneurship, Business & Economic Empowerment

- SPCE graduated the 4th cohort of the Executive Entrepreneurship Training (EET) in Building & Construction with Focus on Green Technology Solutions. (Kyrgyzstan)
- Thrive Global Development Alliance project trained 270 learners in Business Planning and Social Entrepreneurship. (Tajikistan)
- SPCE Afghanistan offered Entrepreneurship programmes through partnerships, even amid crises. (Afghanistan)
- Six Afghan interns received on-the-job entrepreneurship and teaching assistant training. (Afghanistan)



### Technical, Educational and Vocational Training (TVET)

- 173 TVET learners in Tajikistan engaged in hands-on work with various organisations. (Tajikistan)
- SPCE Afghanistan partnered with Afghan Korea TVET Institute to train 30 electricians. (Afghanistan)
- SPCE in Tajikistan launched vocational courses in electricity, cooking, waitering, and plumbing. (Tajikistan)
- Fourteen Afghan TVET learners completed English and ICT programmes in Bishkek. (Kyrgyzstan)



### Digital Skills and ICT

- Over 1800 Kyrgyz civil servants trained in Digital CASA project; 136 earned ICDL certification. (Kyrgyzstan)
- SPCE Tajikistan launched a Digital Lab in Khorog Centre for Entrepreneurship. (Tajikistan)
- Afghanistan launched initiatives in Python, Cyber Security, Security Plus, and more. (Afghanistan)
- Online training in Strategic HR Management provided for 32 women-entrepreneurs. (Kazakhstan)
- Digital Marketing courses introduced in Tajikistan. (Tajikistan)



### English Language Training and Academic Preparation

- English Language programmes offered across all countries, including summer schools, TOEFL/IELTS prep, and Cambridge courses.
- AAP programme in Tajikistan led to 68% university acceptance rate; 13 learners admitted to UCA. (Tajikistan)
- 150 children from deprived Kyrgyz families received English training through the Access Micro Scholarship. (Kyrgyzstan)
- English for Journalists, Ministries, Police, and Spelling Bee projects conducted. (Tajikistan)
- In Afghanistan, 1,260 learners enrolled in Cambridge Accessible Testing System (CATs); 622 females studied English from home. (Afghanistan)



### Teacher & Staff Professional Development

- Teachers were trained on ORT (National Test) methodology, digital tools, and teaching techniques in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.
- English language instructors in Afghanistan trained in pedagogy and ISW, earning certificates. (Afghanistan)
- 40 Tajik instructors trained on the Teaching Knowledge Test; 89% engaged in capacity-building workshops. (Tajikistan)
- Workshop on Teachers' Development conducted in Kazakhstan for 227 English teachers. (Kazakhstan)



### Inclusion, Refugees & Women's Empowerment

- Over 1,000 Afghan refugees enrolled in Tajikistan in English, TVET, and digital courses. (Tajikistan)
- SPCE Afghanistan served 3,035 women, 73% of whom were girls under 13, despite the education ban. (Afghanistan)
- Entrepreneurship course planned to support vulnerable women via SPCE fundraising. (Kyrgyzstan)



## Looking to the Future: Challenges and Opportunities

As SPCE turns its eye to the future, 2023 has provided the opportunity for some key learnings and reflection.

The first is the challenge of online and digital transformation. While the move to digital and virtual systems and mechanisms of teaching and learning hold great potential there are challenges in ensuring equitable access in the face of geographic and economic constraints. There are still segments of the population, particularly in rural or underserved regions, that have limited access to the internet or digital devices. This is especially the case in Afghanistan.

The initial investment in digital infrastructure, talent and other costs related to digital transformation (Moodle platform, equipment, website development, hiring digital learning coordinator), training SPCE instructors on creating online courses and learning to navigate Moodle and talent can be substantial. For example, Internet in Tajikistan and Afghanistan is quite expensive. With regards to teaching and learning, the digitalization process underscores the importance of capacity building in navigating new technological landscapes. The issues faced by learners also reveal the critical need for adaptive course design that aligns with the digital readiness of learners. The challenges among staff illustrate the broader challenge of integrating new technologies into traditional teaching environments. By addressing these through targeted professional development and course adjustments, SPCE has taken significant steps towards overcoming the barriers to digitalization, thus fostering a more resilient and adaptive educational framework.

The year has also provided several learnings SPCE as it turns its eye to the future, some of these key reflections are summarized below:

**Equitable Hands-On Education:** In 2023, SPCE learnt that it is important to enhance focus on practical and

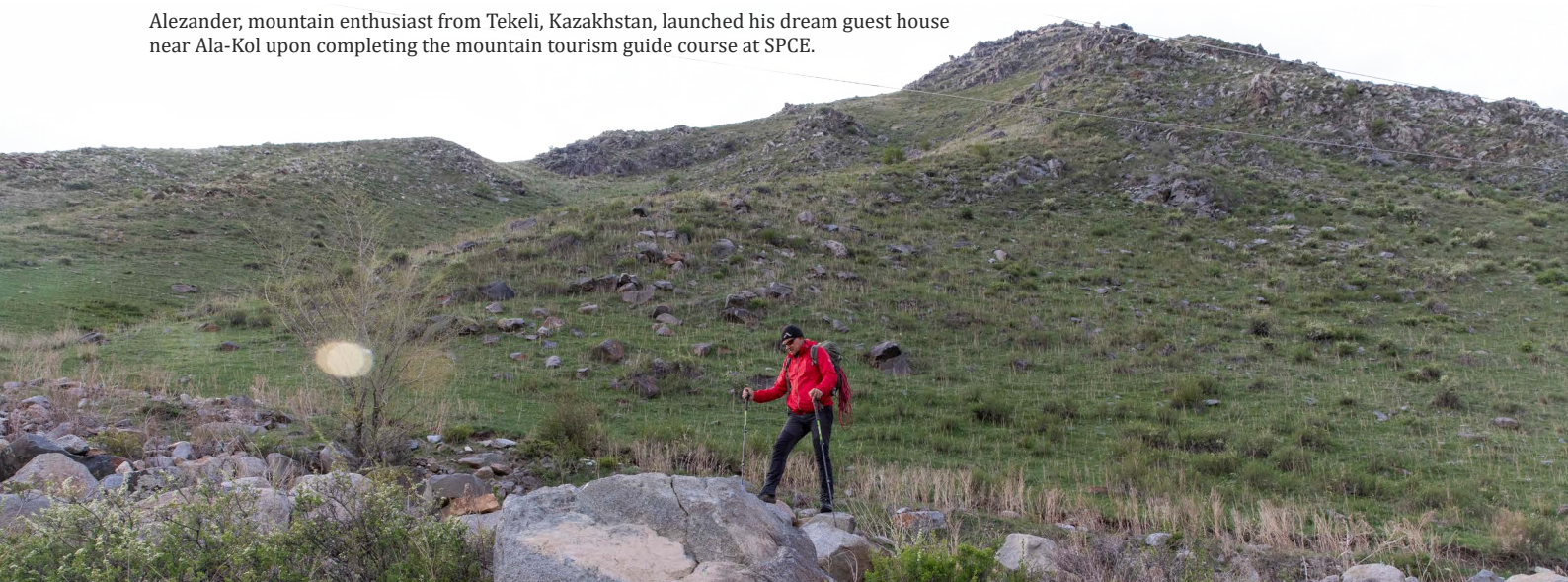
hands-on learning and enable job-creation for female learners. Adult learners, seek practical skills that can be directly applied in their careers. In 2024, SPCE TVET will develop courses such as Cutting and Sewing, Cooking and Baking and Young Technician, Young Artist, and Mobile Repairs to both extend the TVET curriculum and ensure that women are better placed for entrepreneurial and economic success.

**Flexibility for Adult Learners:** SPCE has found that that programmes must meet the varied needs of adult learners, working professionals, and people in rural areas. In 2024, SPCE in Tekeli will focus development of its courses towards adult audiences.

**Education for a Rapidly Evolving Workforce:** Pilot programmes have highlighted the need for curricula that reflect the local job market and cultural needs. Programmes focused on local industries, such as agriculture, entrepreneurship, business incubation and IT, were more effective in helping learners find employment after completing their courses. In 2024, SPCE in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan will continue working in this sphere by promoting educational opportunities that are also in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) including SDG5 (gender mainstreaming) and SDG13 (climate action).

**Climate Change Education:** In 2023, SPCE in Kyrgyzstan piloted Executive Entrepreneurship Training in Building & Construction with focus on Green Technology Solutions for senior executives from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Learnings from this experience included the need to focus on the local context for each country. SPCE also found that climate change education requires scaffolding, and that each course should first cover the basics of environmental sustainability and then dive into the nuances of green solutions. The programme also revealed the importance of environmental sustainability and climate change education, which will be incorporated into SPCE's 2030 Strategy.

Alezander, mountain enthusiast from Tekeli, Kazakhstan, launched his dream guest house near Ala-Kol upon completing the mountain tourism guide course at SPCE.







## International office

The International Office (IO) brings a wide range of benefits to the institution and the broader communities by fostering collaboration in teaching, learning, and research, and promoting diversity and inclusion.



## Central Asian Faculty Development Programme

Established in 2008, the Central Asian Faculty Development Programme (CAFDP) is UCA's flagship UCA designed to enhance access and opportunities for highly qualified doctoral candidates from Central Asia. The programme offers scholarships to study at UCA's partner universities around the world, with these scholarships being co-funded by UCA and its partner institutions.

In 2023, CAFDP supported:

 **53** Central Asian Fellows, at  
 **24** partner universities.

Each fellow is expected to contribute to UCA or the wider Aga Khan Development Network for a period of two to four years, depending on the level of their graduate studies, which may include Master's, PhD, or postdoctoral studies.

## DAAD German Academic Exchange Service

UCA maintains a longstanding partnership with the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), in hosting numerous UCA-DAAD fellows engaged in doctoral research across various disciplines. UCA and the DAAD host an annual joint meeting to review the progress of UCA fellows. This annual event brings together scholars and officials to exchange ideas, discuss research endeavours, and foster academic collaboration. The meeting serves as a valuable platform for UCA fellows to present their work, engage in meaningful discussions, and explore new opportunities for joint initiatives.

## University of Cambridge and Cambridge Trust Collaboration

UCA and the University of Cambridge have an MoU that facilitates a range of collaborative initiatives. This agreement, through the Cambridge Trust, provides joint funding for UCA graduate students, enabling them to pursue studies and research at the University of Cambridge. By accessing the world-class facilities and academic expertise at Cambridge, UCA students receive enhanced support and resources that significantly benefit their academic journeys.

In 2023, this scholarship programme successfully supported two UCA students in studying at Cambridge, allowing them to experience all the benefits and opportunities the university offers. The co-funding initiative is designed to not only aid individual UCA graduate students but also to strengthen the academic and research capabilities of both institutions. This partnership, therefore, bolsters the scholarly and investigative strengths of UCA and the University of Cambridge.

## Simon Fraser University

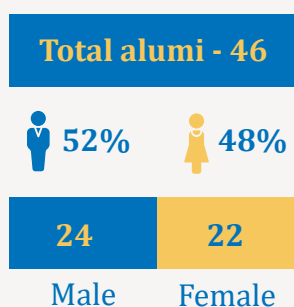
Simon Fraser University (SFU) continues to be one of UCA's most significant partners. Through this collaboration, UCA faculty and graduate students can study at SFU, benefiting from the exchange of knowledge and academic resources between the two institutions.

In a notable achievement, UCA alumna Karlygash Kussainova earned her Master of Science in Computer Science October 2023 convocation of SFU, highlighting the success of our partnership. Now, by joining UCA, she exemplifies her dedication to contributing to and strengthening our community.

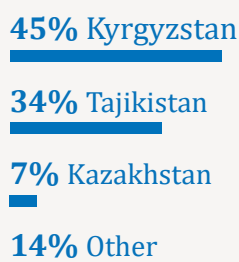
## CAFDP Alumni Statistics



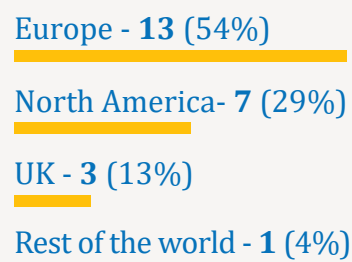
### Gender



### Nationalities



### Partner Universities





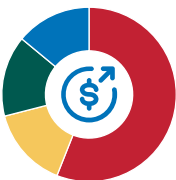
# Financial Overview






## Total investments, grants and revenues, from inception until 2023



## Operating expenses in 2023

Total operating expenses: US\$ 27,5 million

School of Arts and Sciences	56%	
Central Administration and University Planning	15%	
School of Professional and Continuing Education	15%	
Graduate School of Development	14%	

Staff Costs		56%
Operating Costs		15%
Programme Costs		15%
Financing Costs		14%
Depreciation Costs		

## Distribution of Grants Received in 2023

Total grants received: US\$ 3.3 million

### Programme Beneficiary



Graduate School of Development	49%
School of Professional and Continuing Education	17%
School of Arts and Sciences	3%
Other University Programme	32%

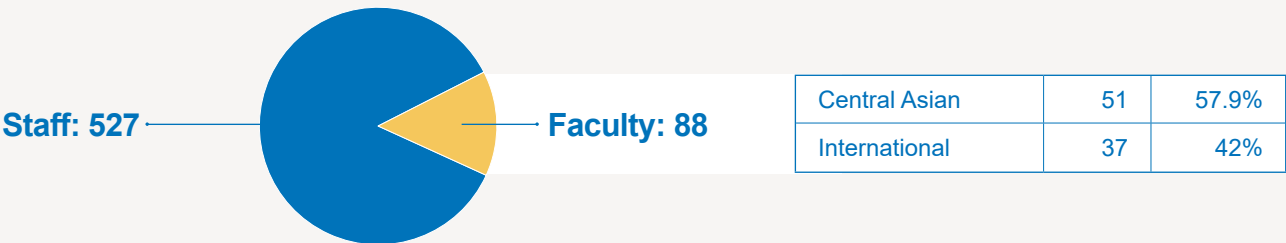
### Donor Origin

United States	67%
Other	24%
Europe	9%

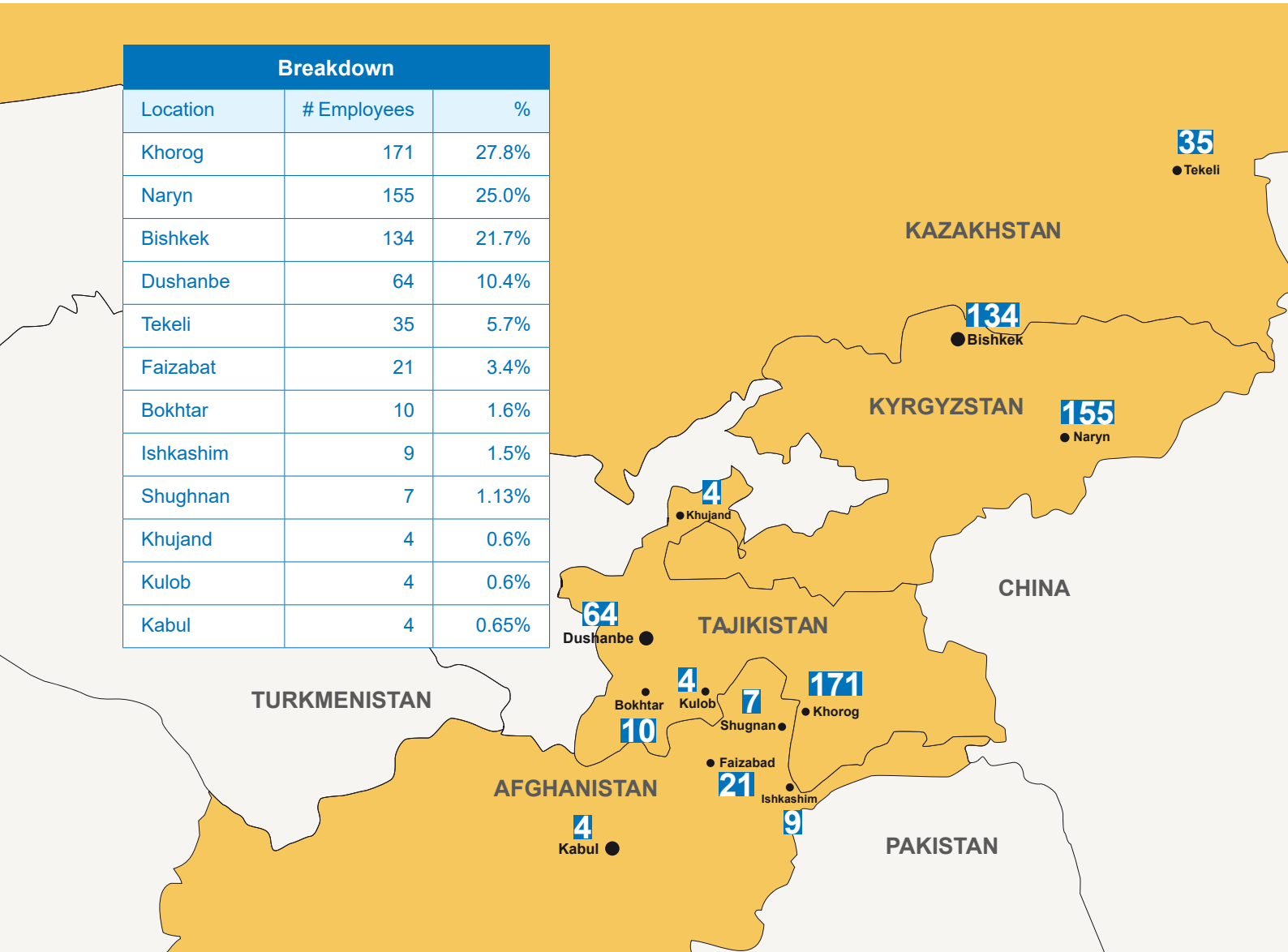


# Human Resource Profile

Faculty and Staff				
615		232 37.7%		383 62.3%
Total employees	Female		Male	



Breakdown		
Location	# Employees	%
Khorog	171	27.8%
Naryn	155	25.0%
Bishkek	134	21.7%
Dushanbe	64	10.4%
Tekeli	35	5.7%
Faizabat	21	3.4%
Bokhtar	10	1.6%
Ishkashim	9	1.5%
Shughnan	7	1.13%
Khujand	4	0.6%
Kulob	4	0.6%
Kabul	4	0.65%





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## INDEPENDENT AUDITOR'S REPORT

To the Board of Trustees of University of Central Asia

### Report on the Audit of Financial Statements

#### Opinion

We have audited the annexed financial statements of **University of Central Asia** (the University), which comprise the statement of financial position as at **31 December 2023**, income and expenditure account, the statement of comprehensive income, statement of changes in funds balances and statement of cash flows for the year then ended, and notes to the financial statements, including material accounting policies and other explanatory information.

In our opinion, the accompanying financial statements present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of the University as at **31 December 2023** and its financial performance and its cash flows for the year then ended in accordance with International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRSs).

#### Basis for Opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (ISAs). Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Statements section of our report. We are independent of the University in accordance with the ethical requirements that are relevant to our audit of the financial statements, and we have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

#### Responsibilities of Management and Those charged with Governance for the Financial Statements

Management is responsible for the preparation and fair presentation of the financial statements in accordance with IFRSs, and for such internal control as management determines is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial statements, management is responsible for assessing the University's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless management either intends to liquidate the University or to cease operations, or has no realistic alternative but to do so.

KPMG Taseer Hadi & Co., a Partnership firm registered in Pakistan and a member firm of the KPMG global organization of independent member firms affiliated with KPMG International Limited, a private English company limited by guarantee.





KPMG Taseer Hadi & Co.

Those charged with governance are responsible for overseeing the University's financial reporting process.

### **Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Statements**

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditors' report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISAs will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements.

As part of an audit in accordance with ISAs, we exercise professional judgment and maintain professional skepticism throughout the audit.

We also:

- Identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the financial statements, whether due to fraud or error, design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks, and obtain audit evidence that is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control.
- Obtain an understanding of internal control relevant to the audit in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the University's internal control.
- Evaluate the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of accounting estimates and related disclosures made by management.
- Conclude on the appropriateness of management's use of the going concern basis of accounting and, based on the audit evidence obtained, whether a material uncertainty exists related to events or conditions that may cast significant doubt on the University's ability to continue as a going concern. If we conclude that a material uncertainty exists, we are required to draw attention in our auditors' report to the related disclosures in the financial statements or, if such disclosures are inadequate, to modify our opinion. Our conclusions are based on the audit evidence obtained up to the date of our auditors' report. However, future events or conditions may cause the University to cease to continue as a going concern.
- Evaluate the overall presentation, structure and content of the financial statements, including the disclosures, and whether the financial statements represent the underlying transactions and events in a manner that achieves fair presentation.

*KPMG*



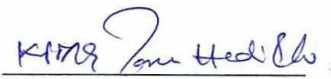
KPMG Taseer Hadi & Co.

We communicate with Those Charged with Governance regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit and significant audit findings, including any significant deficiencies in internal control that we identify during our audit.

The engagement partner on the audit resulting in this independent auditor's report is **Amyr Malik**.

**Karachi**  
**Date: 23-May-24**

**UDIN: AR202310096ioMxfIK0F**

  
**KPMG Taseer Hadi & Co.**  
**Chartered Accountants**



# Institutional Partners

The following institutional partners have contributed to UCA's programmes, and their support is gratefully acknowledged.

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GFZ German Research Centre for Geoscience  
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Global Affairs Canada  
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Naryn Children's Arts School, Kyrgyzstan	Teacher Training College Shughnan, Afghanistan
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Naryn Province Drama Theatre, Kyrgyzstan	The Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids)
Naryn Province Education Department, Kyrgyzstan	The International Centre for Research in Agroforestry – World Agroforestry Centre
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