

# Mapping Educational Change in Kazakhstan

Based on an in-depth ten-year study, this novel book examines the reform of Kazakhstan's education system, from the initial plans and models of change through to the implementation at all stages and places in the education system. Through an exploration of a wide range of data, it maps the problems, models, challenges, interventions and successes of educational change. It covers the viewpoints of all stakeholders involved – policymakers, teachers, regional officials, head teachers, parents and pupils – to provide a comprehensive assessment of people's perspectives at all levels. The book will be invaluable to those interested in the implementation of radical development and change, and it is essential reading for researchers and students in education reform and education policy, as well as teachers and educational professionals. This title is part of the Flip it Open programme and may also be available Open Access. Check our website Cambridge Core for details.

**Colleen McLaughlin** is Emeritus Professor of Education of the University of Cambridge. She was Director of Education Innovation at the Faculty of Education, where she led the Education Reform and Innovation team. Her research interests include educational reform, school university partnerships for educational research, teacher development and mental health in schools.

**Liz Winter** is a lecturer in educational psychology in the School of Education at the University of Exeter. Apart from researching the impacts of educational reform, she is a chartered psychologist interested in how well-being is meaningfully constructed and measured in non-Western contexts.

**Natallia Yakavets** is an Assistant Professor in Educational Leadership and Management in the School of Education at the University of Nottingham. Her research interests relate to how processes of educational reform influence school leadership, teacher professional learning and the quality of student learning, along with inclusion.

# Mapping Educational Change in Kazakhstan

Edited by  
**Colleen McLaughlin**  
University of Cambridge

**Liz Winter**  
University of Exeter

**Natallia Yakavets**  
University of Nottingham



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**To the children and teachers of Kazakhstan and to the future.**

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## CONTRIBUTORS

**Zhanar Abdildina** (Chapter 2) has over thirty years of experience in education. After graduating from the Kazakh State University, Zhanar started her career as a physics and chemistry teacher; she then became a school principal and Head of the Education Department in Stepnogorsk. From 2009 to 2012, Zhanar was the Principal of the Nazarbayev Intellectual School in Kokshetau. Since February 2012, she has been a director of the Centre for Educational Programmes, a branch of Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools AEO. She leads the development of curriculum, textbooks and digital educational resources. Zhanar has authored several articles in scientific and pedagogical journals on the development and implementation of educational programmes. She is a co-author of the OECD position paper ‘The Future of Education and Skills: Education 2030. The Future We Want’ (2018).

**Laila Aringazina** (Chapters 8 and 14) is a junior researcher at the Graduate School of Education at Nazarbayev University (NUGSE). She received her MA in multilingual education at NUGSE and teacher’s qualifications from Muratbayev Zhetysai Humanitarian College and Gumilyov Eurasian National University. Prior to working for NUGSE, Laila was a teacher trainer at the Astana city branch of joint stock company Orleu (National Center of Professional Development), an in-service teacher training institute. She has conducted professional development courses on the content and language integrated learning (CLIL) approach and the renewal of secondary education curriculum for the mainstream school English language teachers. Her research interests include multilingual education, school per-capita funding and school reforms.

**Irina Ausheva** (Chapter 9) is Senior Manager of the Analysis and Monitoring Department of the Center of Excellence, Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences and a professor and corresponding member of the International Academy of Educational

Sciences. Scientific and administrative activity during her work as dean of faculty and university director is related to the development and practical implementation of the model of continuous professional education of teachers in the lyceum–college–university system. This focus has been further developed while working as a leading expert at the National Centre for Education Quality Assessment of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Irina is currently conducting monitoring studies on the diagnosis of teachers’ professional problems, the quality of educational processes implemented by the Center of Excellence, the integration of innovations into school practices and the effectiveness of leading schools as a mechanism for scaling up best practices. A total of 103 studies have been conducted in this area, the results of which have been published in over eighty analytical reviews and scientific articles.

**Madina Ayubayeva** (Select Bibliography)

**Nazipa Ayubayeva** (Chapters 2, 11 and 13) has been the Deputy Chair of the Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools since September 2022 and worked in the same capacity between 2009 and 2019. She has received her MPhil and PhD from the University of Cambridge (UK) and holds an MBA degree from the MP Birla Institute of Management in Bangalore (India). She has worked as a senior researcher at the Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education, as a manager of the JSC National Analytical Center and the National Bank of the Republic of Kazakhstan. She was a human resources development trainer with the TACIS project ‘Support of the Eurasian Center for Kazakhstan Civil Servants Training’ led by the British Council and has experience of working in regional projects for the European Commission, the American Agency on International Development and the World Trade Institute. Nazipa started her career as a teacher in a secondary school in Kazakhstan.

**David Bridges** (Introduction and Chapter 3) is Emeritus Professor of the University of East Anglia (where he was previously Pro Vice Chancellor) and was an emeritus fellow of St Edmund’s College and Homerton College, Cambridge. He was previously a professorial fellow and the Director of Research in the University of Cambridge’s Faculty of Education, in which capacity he led the Cambridge side of the research collaboration with Nazarbayev University and was closely associated with the development of the AEO Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools, of which he was a board member. The book he edited under the title *Educational Reform and Internationalisation: The Case of School Reform in Kazakhstan* (2014) was one product of these collaborations. In his long career in education, he has served on the councils of both the British and the European Educational Research Association and chaired the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain, worked as a research and policy advisor in many international settings and published some 120 books and papers, including *Philosophy in Educational Research: Epistemology,*

*Ethics, Politics and Quality Assessment* (2017) and *Ethics in Educational Practice, Policy and Research* (2022).

**Nick Fielding** (Preface) is a journalist and author with wide experience of reporting both domestically and internationally and extensive editing skills. He was a senior reporter for the *Sunday Times* for many years, where he covered the aftermath and implications of the 9/11 attacks, reporting from Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Far East. Prior to that, he worked as Chief Investigative Reporter for the *Mail on Sunday*, where he authored a number of world exclusives. He has written books on the 9/11 attacks and the history of Britain's domestic intelligence agency MI5. He has also travelled extensively in Siberia and Central Asia and written and edited a number of books about this vast region, including *Travellers in the Great Steppe: From the Papal Envoys to the Russian Revolution* and a collection of writings by the great Kazakh historian and ethnographer Chokan Valikhanov.

**Olena Fim'yar** (Chapters 3 and 14), at the time of writing her contribution to this book, was a senior research associate in the Education Reform and Innovation team at the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge, where she had worked for nine years until May 2022. As part of her work, Olena researched the process of education reform, teacher identity and student transition from school to higher education in Kazakhstan and Ukraine. She was also a founding member of the Ukrainian Educational Research Association. Olena's PhD thesis (Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge) explored the issues surrounding education reform, actors and the balance of power of educational policymaking in Ukraine. Before embarking on her research career, for five years, Olena worked as an EFL teacher in Oleshkivska (Tsyurupynska) Gymnasium, Kherson region, Ukraine.

**David Frost** (Chapter 10) is an emeritus fellow of Wolfson College, Cambridge. As a member of the University of Cambridge's Faculty of Education from 1996 to 2016, his research and teaching focused on educational leadership and school improvement. He was one of the co-founders of the Leadership for Learning Network and a founder member of the board of trustees of the HertsCam Network, where he currently serves as Director. David founded the International Teacher Leadership initiative with partners in twenty countries. He has developed strategies to support teachers as agents of change playing key roles in the creation and transfer of professional knowledge. He has published widely and continues to publish and address audiences of school principals, teachers and educational leaders around the world.

**Bridget Goodman** (Chapter 4) is Associate Professor of Multilingual Education at the Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education (NUGSE). Her PhD research at the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education, USA, was an ethnographic case study of a Ukrainian university engaged in English

medium education (EME). Since becoming a faculty member at NUGSE in 2014, her research, teaching and supervision interests have included (1) the policy and practice of EME and trilingual education in Eurasian contexts, (2) the development of academic communication skills in multilingual Kazakhstani universities and (3) minority language rights and practices in education in Kazakhstan. Her research has been published in *TESOL Quarterly*, the *Journal of Second Language Writing* and the *Annual Review of Comparative and International Education*.

**Janet Helmer** (Chapter 14) is an associate professor working across both school and inclusive education at Nazarbayev University in Kazakhstan. At Nazarbayev University, she contributes to the MA, MSc and PhD-level courses and the supervision of graduate students. Much of her research has looked at educational equity, social justice and well-being for marginalised groups living in geographically isolated areas, with a current emphasis on the advancement of inclusive education in Kazakhstan. Current research includes inclusive education within the early childhood sector; the impact of COVID-19 on education and the well-being of teachers, students and families; the implementation of STEM and STEAM in primary classrooms; the experiences of novice teachers; and the development of a Kazakhstani Teaching Observation Protocol.

**Daniel Hernández-Torrano** (Chapter 5) is an associate professor in the Graduate School of Education at Nazarbayev University. Dr Hernández-Torrano obtained his PhD in educational psychology from the University of Murcia in Spain and has held research positions at University College London (UK), Universidade do Minho (Portugal) and the University of Connecticut (USA). He teaches courses in quantitative research methodology, educational psychology and inclusive education. His main areas of interest are gifted education, inclusive education, the intersection between excellence and equity and young people's well-being.

**Svetlana Ispusinova** (Chapters 1 and 2) has been a deputy chairperson of Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (NIS AEO) since 2012 and previously worked as a director of the Human Resource Department. In the period from February to June 2019, she was a chairperson of the NIS AEO. In the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Svetlana held the positions of Head of Unit, Head of Division and Director of the Preschool and Secondary Education Department. Earlier, she was appointed as Head of Atyrau Oblast Education Department, Principal in Atyrau and Taraz city schools, Deputy Principal of pastoral work and history teacher in Guriyev oblast.

**Zhanbota Kabdykarimova**, MA (Chapters 2 and 9), is Director of the Center of Excellence. She began her work as a teacher in a village school and has experience as a teacher and head of a general education school and a Nazarbayev Intellectual School. Zhanbota has worked as a deputy chairperson of JSC National Center of

Professional Development, Orleu, and supervised the training of teachers of general education schools in the Republic of Kazakhstan on professional development courses based on the programmes of Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools, jointly developed with the University of Cambridge. She has also been working at the Center of Excellence since March 2015. Under her leadership, a model of post-course methodological support for teachers has been developed through a network of leading schools (support platforms). Together with colleagues, she is engaged in a large-scale research project into the professional potential of Kazakhstan's leading schools. She is also actively involved in the implementation of the lesson study approach in the country's schools.

**Assel Kambatyrova** (Chapter 6) is a postdoctoral scholar working on the project 'Building Capacity for Teaching and Research in STEM Teacher Education in Kazakhstan: A Research–Practice Partnership' at Nazarbayev University. She obtained an MA degree in education from the University of Sheffield, UK, and her doctorate from Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education (NUGSE), Kazakhstan. Prior to doing her doctorate, Assel has served as a junior researcher at the Research Institute of NUGSE. She has been engaged in a number of research projects on schooling systems, trilingual education, English Medium Instruction (EMI) and STEM education at tertiary level and co-authored book chapters and journal articles. Assel's research interests include issues related to trilingual education, EMI at secondary and tertiary levels, language-in-education policy and family language policy.

**Rita Kasa**, PhD (Chapter 8), is an associate professor at Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education in Astana, Kazakhstan, and a research fellow with the Stockholm School of Economics in Riga, Latvia. Rita holds a PhD in comparative education from the State University of New York in Buffalo, USA. Her research interests concern educational policy, governance and finance, as well as transnational educational mobility. Her research outputs have been published in peer-reviewed journals such as *Central Asian Survey*, *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, the *International Journal of Educational Development*, *Policy Reviews in Higher Education* and the *Journal of Educational Change*.

**Zarina Khamidulina** (Chapter 13) is Senior Manager (Analysis, Research and Project Management Department) at the Centre for Educational Programmes at Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (NIS) in Kazakhstan. She received her MS degree from Nazarbayev University (NUGSE) and a teacher's qualification from Karaganda Buketov University. Zarina has seven years of professional experience at the NIS and has taken part in implementing projects and research activities related to early childhood education, trilingual education and curriculum development. She has participated in the OECD working group for The Future of Education and Skills 2030 project from Kazakhstan. Her current research interests include multilingual

education, content and language integrated learning (CLIL), educational reform and early childhood education.

**Kairat Kurakbayev** (Chapter 3) is Assistant Professor at Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education, Kazakhstan. He holds a PhD in Comparative and International Education from the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of Columbia University. Kairat's professional experience includes working as an English school teacher and a teacher educator on initial teacher education programmes. Kairat's research interests centre on issues of international educational transfer and globalisation of education.

**Zhadyra Makhmetova** (Chapter 16) recently earned her PhD in education from the Graduate School of Education, Nazarbayev University. Her PhD dissertation was on Kazakhstani primary pre-service teachers' understanding of assessment. During her PhD, she has worked as a research assistant on several different projects, including the collaborative research project of the Graduate School of Education of Nazarbayev University, the University of Cambridge and Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools on 'The Reform of Key Elements of Schools in Kazakhstan – Curriculum, Assessment, and Pedagogy'. Currently, Zhadyra is a postdoctoral research assistant on the project 'Equitable Access to Education in the Period of COVID-19 in Kazakhstan: Experience, Results, Challenges, and Opportunities'. Her research interests include teacher education, initial assessment education, gender studies, politics of inequality, equity in education in Central Asian and post-Soviet contexts, globalisation and internationalisation of education and mixed-methods research.

**Tsediso Michael Makoelle** (Chapter 5) is a recipient of the prestigious Nelson Mandela scholarship to the United Kingdom. He holds a Doctor of Philosophy in inclusive education from the University of Manchester, UK, and a Doctor of Education in education management and leadership from the University of South Africa. His teaching and research experience stretches over thirty years in secondary and higher education. He has worked as high school teacher, head of department, vice principal and principal in several secondary schools in the Free State Education Department of the Republic of South Africa. He was notably a lecturer and senior lecturer at Cape Peninsula University of Technology, Cape Town, and the University of Johannesburg. For nearly eight years, he has worked at Nazarbayev University, Kazakhstan, as Associate Professor, Director of Doctoral Studies, General Director for Research and, recently, as Vice Dean for Research at the Graduate School of Education.

**Kathy Malone** (Chapters 4, 15 and 16) was an associate professor of education in the Graduate School of Education at Nazarbayev University in Kazakhstan from 2017 to 2022. Her research focuses on educational reform efforts K–16, primarily in STEM/STEAM education. Kathy has studied the use of innovative teaching practices which incorporate arts, engineering and creative modelling tasks and their effects on



student attitudes, content knowledge and metacognitive skills. She received her PhD from Carnegie Mellon University's Center for Innovation in Learning and has served as a postdoctoral scholar at the University of Pittsburgh's Learning Research and Development Center. She is currently Assistant Professor of Physics and Astronomy at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo, USA.

**Colleen McLaughlin** (Introduction and Chapters 1, 11, 12 and 17) is Emeritus Professor of Education of the University of Cambridge. Her latest role in the university was as a senior advisor to the VC and Director of Education Innovation at the Faculty of Education, where she led the Education Reform and Innovation team. The team specialised in systemic, research-informed reform working with governments, NGOs and others, including CARA in Syria, on the transformation of the school education system in Kazakhstan, with the Aga Khan Foundation in Central Asia and the province of Jinan in China. She has undertaken major research and published on the topics of educational reform, school university partnerships for educational research, teacher development and mental health in schools. She has been a head of department at the University of Sussex and the Deputy Head of Faculty at Cambridge. Her most recent book is *Implementing Educational Reform: Cases and Challenges* (2021, with Alan Ruby).

**Ali Ait Si Mhamed** (Chapter 8) is an associate professor at the Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education, Astana, Kazakhstan. Prior to his current position, he has occupied roles in higher education institutions nationally and internationally. His professional expertise includes being programme director, research chair, quality assurance chair and accreditation lead. He has led a diverse career path, including as programme designer, teacher and research and technical assistant in the USA, Morocco, Egypt, Latvia, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. His research interests include higher education governance, higher education finance, higher education transformation and higher education policy and reform. He has an impressive list of publications in high-indexed Q1 and Q2 journals of Springer, Taylor & Francis and Elsevier. Dr Ait Si Mhamed was awarded a Fulbright scholarship in 2011–2012 to Northern Europe. He earned his PhD in comparative and international higher education from the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy, Graduate School of Education at SUNY, Buffalo, New York, under the guidance and supervision of the Emeritus Professor and former chancellor of the SUNY system Bruce Johnstone.

**Olga Mozhayeva** (Chapters 2 and 7) has been a deputy chairperson of NIS AEO since 2019 and previously worked as a director of the Education Quality Assessment Department. She has a degree of Candidate of Biological Sciences. She has held the positions of Deputy Director of the National Center for Education Quality Assessment of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan and Head of the Tselinograd District Education Department in Akmola oblast. At the beginning of her career, she had worked as a biology teacher, a deputy principal of a school and a school principal.

**Alexandra Nam** (Chapter 4) is a research assistant at the Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education. She received her MA in multilingual education from Nazarbayev University in 2018 and since then has assisted in research projects and provided data collection and data analysis services to the Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education, the Research Institute of Social and Gender Studies in the Kazakh State Women's Pedagogical Institute and the Young Researchers Alliance in Kazakhstan. Until September 2022, she was a leading specialist in the Department of Science, Innovation and Analytics at the JSC National Center of Professional Development in Kazakhstan. As part of the Political Economy of Education Research (PEER) project, she is currently an associate of the Centre for International Education at the University of Sussex.

**Dr Gulmira Qanay** (Chapter 8, 10 and 15) is currently serving as the Rector (President) of the Kazakh National Women's Teacher Training University in Almaty, Kazakhstan. She was an alumna of Talap and Bolashak international scholarships. She holds a PhD in education from the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education and an MA in school leadership and management from the Institute of Education, University of Warwick (UK). She started her career as a teacher of English in schools and higher education institutes in Kazakhstan. In the framework of collaboration of Kazakhstan and UK-based organisations, Gulmira has been involved in implementing and monitoring the Teacher Leadership in Kazakhstan initiative, which currently includes thirty-five school principals, sixty-two vice-principals and 500 teachers from urban and rural schools of Kazakhstan. She is also a researcher in NUGSE research projects on school transformations conducted in collaboration with the University of Cambridge, which includes an initial exploration of the per-capita funding system in Kazakhstan.

**Zamira Rakhymbayeva** (Chapter 7) is Deputy Director of the Center for Pedagogical Measurements at Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools managing in effect a radical transformation of services and the utilisation of enhanced skills, methods and technologies in assessment. She was a project manager for the student selection system, managing all steps related to building the assessment system, from item development to end reports. At the same time, an extensive part of her experience is in psychometric and statistical data analysis using CTT and IRT, coordination of statistical and psychometric data analysis and the development of IT tools for assessments.

**Aizhan Ramazanova** (Chapter 6) is Director of the Research Department at Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (NIS) in Kazakhstan. Her main role is the coordination of research works conducted in the organisation, including affiliated centres and schools. She is a member of the Research Advisory Board of the NIS, the Organising and Academic Committee of the NIS International Conference and various working groups related to education changes and organisation transformation. She has almost ten years of work experience at the NIS. Ms Ramazanova has

participated in a wide variety of professional courses related to curriculum development, education research, teacher research, trilingual education, design thinking and so on. She has also participated in the OECD working group of The Future of Education and Skills 2030 project from Kazakhstan. Her research interests relate to education policy, research in education and early childhood education. Ms Ramazanova was appointed as an expert in the field of early childhood education for the national project 'Change Management Leaders'. She is a co-founder of the NGO Institute of Childhood OYNA (*oyna* means play in Kazakh). Aizhan graduated from the University of York (UK) and Nazarbayev University (Kazakhstan). Currently, she is doing her PhD in education at Nazarbayev University.

**Kulyash Shamshidinova** (Chapter 1) is the Chairperson of the Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools. In 2019, she served as Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Prior to becoming the NIS Chairperson, she was twice appointed to the position of the Vice-Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan for a period of five years (2002–2005 and 2007–2009). Previously, she has held the positions of CEO of the Bobek National Scientific Practical Education and Health Centre, Deputy Mayor of Taldykorgan, Instructor of the Taldykorgan Oblast Party Committee, Secretary of the Taldykorgan City Party Committee and Deputy Director of the Taldykorgan Oblast In-Service Teacher Training Institute. She began her career as a chemistry teacher and a secondary school principal in the Almaty oblast.

**Assel Sharimova** (Select Bibliography)

**Aidana Shilibekova** (Chapters 2 and 7) is the Director of the Center for Pedagogical Measurements at Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools and holds the Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences. Previously, she was a computer science teacher, taught at the Pedagogical Institute and worked as an analyst in the Statistics Department of the centre. She is a certified trainer and assessment expert in the level courses of the Center for Pedagogical Excellence. In 2015–2016, she completed a scientific internship under the Bolashak Programme at the University of Leicester, UK. She has participated in the development of criteria-based assessment methodology, final attestation, as well as in conducting research projects on the satisfaction of graduates of Intellectual Schools, the effectiveness of criteria-based assessment, piloting of the renewed content of education and so on. Under her leadership, the Center for Pedagogical Measurements is engaged in the development of innovative approaches to assessment, including machine learning and computer testing technologies, changes to the format and procedures of final attestation.

**Michelle Somerton** (Chapter 5) is a specialist in inclusive education with research interests in barriers to learning for children with autism and developmental disorders. Dr Somerton has worked in Australia and Central Asia (the post-Soviet

context) and taught inclusive education policy, leadership, research methods in education and development of inclusive schools. She has many years of experience in teaching and research supervision of master and doctoral students and has been appointed Chair of the Nazarbayev University Special Learning Needs Committee.

**Xeniya Tursunbayeva** (Chapter 14) is Director of the Department for Research, Innovations and Analytics at 'Orleu' National Centre for Professional Development. She started her career teaching English and linguistics at a regional Kazakhstani university. Studying for a PhD in education, she volunteered in several research projects, including gifted education and students' well-being in school. From 2018 to 2021, she took part in the collaborative project Translation and Continuity of the Educational Innovations in the Secondary Education System of Kazakhstan as part of her work in the Research Department of Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools AEO. Xeniya is a representative of the Emerging Researchers' Group of the European Educational Research Association that promotes early-career research and emerging scholars on an international scale.

**Liz Winter**, PhD (Chapters 6, 8, 12, 13 and 16), is currently a lecturer in educational psychology in the School of Education at the University of Exeter. Her current research interests focus on post-pandemic school engagement and social equity. Dr Winter worked extensively in Kazakhstan from 2012 to 2022 for the University of Cambridge as a partner-advisor supporting the establishment and later quality assurance of the Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education. This ten-year collaboration included significant research activities to gather evidence from schools on the piloting and roll-out of the renewed content of education, the introduction of per-capita funding and, with funding from the British Council, school students' well-being and engagement in Kazakhstan. Aside from academic publications, Dr Winter has provided policy papers to the Ministry of Education and Science in Kazakhstan on topics such as the National Qualifications Framework and the professional development of teachers.

**Natallia Yakavets**, PhD (Chapters 5, 6 and 15), is Assistant Professor in Educational Leadership and Management in the School of Education, University of Nottingham. Previously she was a senior research associate in the Faculty of Education at the University of Cambridge. She holds a PhD in educational leadership and management from The Open University, UK. Her central research interests are leadership in transitional and post-Soviet contexts, school improvement, teacher professional education, educational reform and inclusive education. She has been carrying out research in the educational contexts in Kazakhstan since 2012. She has worked with the United Nations Children's Fund to support the Kazakhstan Ministry of Education and Science in developing and piloting an early warning system for preventing, identifying and responding to school dropouts of children with special educational needs and behavioural difficulties (2018–2021). Dr Yakavets has presented the results of her research at many international conferences and meetings.

**Almira Yembergenova** (Chapter 4) is currently doing her PhD at Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education (NUGSE). She has previously worked at the Nazarbayev Intellectual School in Karaganda as an English teacher and a teacher of global perspectives and project work. After completing an MSc in educational leadership at Nazarbayev University, she has worked as a trilingual education coordinator and Head of the Department of English Language and Global Perspectives and Project Work at NIS Karaganda. Since 2021, she has been working as a research assistant at NUGSE. Her research interests are Kazakh language teaching in secondary schools, teaching subjects in second or third languages and the use of content and language integrated learning (CLIL) in multilingual education.

**Zhanyl Zhontayeva**, PhD (Chapters 1, 8 and 15), is the Director of Professional Development Programmes in the Graduate School of Education (GSE) at Nazarbayev University. She has worked as a teacher, a director of a school and the Head of the Department of Education in the Kyzylorda region. Also, Zhanyl was Director of the Department of Preschool and Secondary Education in the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan. In her position, she was involved in developing strategic documents on secondary education in Kazakhstan. At the GSE, Zhanyl coordinates professional development programmes for educators at all levels. Most of the programmes comply with implementing educational reforms such as inclusive education, per-capita funding, leadership, curriculum design and in-service teacher training. Moreover, she has participated in the development of ten curriculum designs for higher education institutions in Kazakhstan while coordinating the professional development programme on curriculum design. She has been involved in joint research projects with the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education on school education. Zhanyl has also been taking part in the World Bank project on the development of thirty educational programmes for teacher education in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

**Dinara Ziyedenova** (Chapter 7) is Deputy Director of the Center for Pedagogical Measurements at Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (NIS) and holds a master's in philology. She was a teacher of a foreign language at university and the Nazarbayev Intellectual School and served as a senior manager in the Education Quality Assessment Department of the NIS. Dinara is actively involved in research and international projects together with NIS strategic partners. She has participated in the development and implementation of the renewed content of primary education in thirty pilot schools, as well as of methodology and teaching materials for the criteria-based assessment system.

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## PREFACE

The publication of *Mapping Educational Change in Kazakhstan*, a decade in the making, is the result of an unprecedented collaboration between education practitioners and researchers in both Britain and Kazakhstan, who have taken on the immense project of reforming Kazakhstan's education sector. Not only that, they have also set out to introduce national reforms in a little over half the time that such changes would generally be brought into effect.

The first part of this project came to fruition in 2014 with the publication by Cambridge University Press of *Educational Reform and Internationalisation: The Case of School Reform in Kazakhstan*.<sup>1</sup> This happened at a critical moment in the history of the country. Faced with substantial problems in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan's leaders recognised that a fundamental element in preparing their newly independent country for the future was a wholesale transformation of its education system to bring it into line with international norms. That required both an understanding of where things stood at that time and where they needed to go.

This 2014 volume set out the background and provided the rationale for the desperately needed changes in a country expecting an increase in the number of young people of around 50 per cent by 2030 and hoping to use education to catapult itself into the top thirty most-developed countries in the world by that time.

At the centre of the reforms – which were developed by a team from the University of Cambridge's Faculty of Education working with the Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (NIS), the Graduate School of Education at Nazarbayev University and the Ministry of Education – was the retraining of all of Kazakhstan's teachers, who had been taught to operate in a system that did not encourage inquisitiveness in either teachers or pupils and against a background in which teaching itself was seen as a poorly rewarded, low-status profession.

<sup>1</sup> David Bridges (ed), *Educational Reform and Internationalisation: The Case of School Reform in Kazakhstan*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Those involved in drawing up these reforms understood that education also had to become student-centred while at the same time dealing with the implementation of a policy of trilingualism. In addition, the Kazakh language itself was due to switch from Cyrillic to Latin script by 2025, and there were also substantial problems to be overcome in setting up a finance model that ensured pupils were treated equally in both urban and more remote rural schools.

In more general terms, Kazakhstan's leaders recognised that education reform should also honour both its recent and distant cultural heritage, as well as reach the standards found in the international sector.

By any measure, these were huge objectives. Yet, by working together with international experts, Kazakhstan's education sector eagerly took up the reform initiatives such as the NIS, which rapidly became centres of excellence and allowed new thinking to be spread quickly throughout the whole country.

This book, which is a companion volume to the 2014 publication, covers the period from 2015 to 2022. Amongst other things, it examines the scaling up to national level of the experience of the NIS, where many of the reforms under discussion were first piloted. The book presents empirical research evidence from across the country, as collected by the same teams – both Kazakh and international – that worked on the first book, many of whom have now been working together for more than a decade. The reform of the entire education system of Kazakhstan has been designed from the outset so that data collection and analysis would be central to the entire process.

This book examines the empirical evidence in three distinct areas of work in order to study what is in effect a sustained attempt to reform a whole school system as a way of bridging the gap between the old Soviet traditions and the newer thinking now prevalent in Western Europe. That in itself is remarkable; it is not often that researchers, policymakers and practitioners are able to share their experiences and, at the same time, contribute to a debate that feeds directly into the processes of policy development at the highest levels of government.

The essays in the first section of the book analyse the reforms that have taken place, such as trilingualism, the teaching of science, new structures and the ways in which scaling up has been organised, particularly in relation to equal access to education.

The second section examines the goals and outcomes of both national and local piloting of new approaches, again using empirical research. It also looks into new ways of financing schools, particularly through per-capita funding and how to encourage leadership qualities in teachers.



The final section is based on three important case studies from three separate regions of Kazakhstan and aims to assess how the reforms have been rolled out and to what effect. Each study looks at stakeholders' perspectives on education reform and seeks to extrapolate regional management issues.

Although the timeframe for overhauling Kazakhstan's education system has been short, it is by no means over. It has been remarked that thirty years after it declared its independence, Kazakhstan is at a turning point in its transition from a Soviet client state to a fully fledged independent state. It lies at the heart of Asia and provides a natural bridge between East and West. At the same time, it is subject to instability from neighbouring regions, as events in 2022 have shown only too well. Whatever happens over the next few years, it is highly likely that education policy will be a major part of the debate. The reforms outlined here, together with the educational structures they have created, will continue to play a part in ensuring Kazakhstan delivers to its people an education system which they can be proud of.



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The whole endeavour would not have been possible without the teachers and students in both Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools and, later, the mainstream schools of Kazakhstan. Their commitment and serious hardworking attitudes are memorable. We are very grateful for their patience and participation.

We thank also Cambridge University Press and Rebecca Taylor, in particular, for helping us publish such a detailed study of a country over time; it is unusual and hopefully highly valuable. Thank you also to Julie Potter and Paola Contreras for their careful work on the final manuscript, which kept me (Colleen McLaughlin) sane, and to Isabel Collins at Cambridge University Press for doing all the final production.