

## **RGU: News Release**

### **East meets West to enhance quality in HE**

A straw poll of current perceptions of the former Soviet republic of Kazakhstan would probably return a high volume of responses relating to Sasha Baron Cohen's comic creation – the offensive and accident-prone journalist, Borat. However, the reality of modern-day Kazakhstan could not be further from this image. It is that of a thriving and progressive country enjoying a period of exceptional economic growth, thanks in part to its abundance of mineral ores and substantial reserves of oil and gas. Indeed, most major international oil and gas companies have established a presence in Kazakhstan, resulting in a pressing need to recruit trained professionals.

With this in mind, Universities in the UK have been quick to respond to this imperative, attracting increasing numbers of international students in recent years. However, they have been equally quick to realise that former Eastern block countries such as Kazakhstan have a strong desire to develop and improve their own universities. A prime example of this was the establishment of a new university in Kazakhstan in 2001 – the Kazakh British Technical University (KBTU) - in conjunction with four partner institutions in the UK: The Robert Gordon University (RGU) in Aberdeen, the University of Aberdeen, Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh, and the University of Westminster in London. Initially the relationship between KBTU and its UK partners was brokered and facilitated by RGU's wholly-owned commercial subsidiary, **Univation Ltd**. As a consequence, RGU has emerged as the lead partner in the UK, and has continued to maintain and develop close links with KBTU in relation to both academic programmes and administrative initiatives.

Most recently, this week has seen three representatives from KBTU spending time at RGU, as part of a 526,000 Euro TEMPUS funded project aimed at facilitating the development of both – new business curricula – and a Quality Assurance (QA) / Quality Enhancement (QE) facility at

KBTU. The Trans-European mobility scheme for university studies (TEMPUS) funds projects between the higher education sector in the EU and its 26 partner countries in the areas of curriculum development and innovation, teacher training, university management, and structural reforms in higher education.

Dr David Lal, Reader at RGU's Aberdeen Business School, is the co-ordinator of the current TEMPUS project between RGU, three universities in Kazakhstan (of which KBTU is the main partner and main recipient of the funding) and our Italian partner University Carlo Cattaneo University (LIUC) from Castellanza. As he explains, "The purpose of this stage of the programme is to allow an understanding of the need for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and to assist KBTU in the development of a suitable Quality Assurance and Enhancement Unit for their University. This is quite a tall order and therefore this week is being devoted to assisting the staff from KBTU in understanding the RGU approach towards the implementation of our Quality Assurance Programme in meeting the needs of our University, society, government policy and industry."

Thereafter, an associated programme of activities will be jointly developed between the partner institutions, including delivering a workshop on QA and E systems in Kazakhstan, assisting in the creation of a QA and E office at KBTU and developing KBTU staff's knowledge of relevant policies and procedures associated with monitoring, audit and evaluation.

Dr Adil K. Akhmetov is the (Director of International Affairs) of KBTU. He remarked that his time in Aberdeen had proved extremely valuable: "My colleagues and I have learned a great deal here, thanks to the comprehensive programme of seminars and meetings organised by Dr Lal. The QA structures and processes at RGU are rigorous at every level, right through from student recruitment and admissions, to delivery of courses, assessment, industrial placement and student feedback.

"As a result of all that we have learned during this visit, and the other activities of the Tempus project, we envisage creating our own Quality

Assurance and Enhancement unit at KBTU and this will set a new standard within the Higher Education Sector in our country. When we return to Kazakhstan, my colleagues and I plan to organise workshops for our managers at KBTU and for our two Kazakh partner Institutions - in order to transfer the knowledge and ideas we have acquired during our time in Aberdeen."

RGU also played host to a representative from their other partner university in Italy. Eliana Minelli is the co-ordinator of the evaluation board at Carlo Cattaneo University in Castellanza, near Milan. Her role entails co-ordinating and delivering the QA systems at the Carlo Cattaneo University, which the visitors from Kazakhstan will encounter during a trip there later this year.

Eliana echoed Dr Akhmetov's reactions to the visit: "The staff workshops and presentations have demonstrated that the QA systems at RGU are extremely coherent and efficient and they meet the highest standards within the European QA system. In addition I have found all the staff here to be extremely committed and highly effective with a strong culture of quality permeating all levels of the organisation."

The TEMPUS funded project is just the latest example of an initiative arising from the close relationship between RGU and KBTU. Last summer saw the first Kazakh cohort graduate from the RGU-led MSc Human Resource Management programme, in the presence of HRH Prince Andrew, Duke of York.

Furthermore, the number of taught programmes at KBTU is steadily expanding, and now includes a Masters of Science in International Business. Twenty students are currently enrolled on this programme at KBTU, which is being taught by a combination of video-conferencing, online material delivered via the Virtual Campus and face-to-face teaching. Dr Farooq Ahmad, recently spent a week in Kazakhstan, teaching a module on Finance for Managers. He said, "The collaboration is working extremely well and we have received very positive feedback from both the students and academic staff at KBTU."

In addition to this initiative, RGU recently hosted the Secretary-General of EURASHE (European Association for Institutions in Higher Education – based in Brussels) following the successful joint bid to the European Commission for Euros 150,000 – in order to host a conference on Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Kazakhstan. This conference, which will be held at KBTU in Almaty in July 2007 will include key speakers from every country in the European Community and will also include delegates from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

For further information on the RGU – KBTU Tempus project contact Dr David Lal on (01224) 263833 or by email: [d.lal@rgu.ac.uk](mailto:d.lal@rgu.ac.uk).

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#### **Notes to editor**

The Trans-European mobility scheme for university studies funds projects between the higher education sector in the EU and its 26 partner countries to facilitate university modernisation, mutual learning between regions and peoples and understanding between cultures. The Tempus partner regions are the Western Balkans, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, North Africa and the Middle East.

The Tempus programme funds cooperation projects in the areas of curriculum development and innovation, teacher training, university management, and structural reforms in higher education. It puts special emphasis on the mobility of academic and administrative staff from higher education institutions, both from the EU and the partner countries.