Higher Education in Uzbekistan

1. National Programme for Personnel Training

After independence in 1991, Uzbekistan became the master of its own way of economic and social development and had the task to construct a democratic state and open civil society, a socially-oriented market economy. All this entailed a radical reform of the education system in Uzbekistan. Education had to be reoriented towards meeting the common national interest and ensuring competitiveness in the world market. Uzbekistan became a member of the international community and was keen to develop a modern system of education.

The importance of the reform of the education system should be considered in the context of the demography of Uzbekistan: the population of the Republic of Uzbekistan is more than 26 million 485 thousand people (by the 4-th quarter of 2006), over 11 million of young people are less than 17 years of age. This is 42% of the population. On 29 August 1997 President Islam Karimov signed the Law on the establishment of a “National Programme for Personnel Training”, which provides a long-term strategy for strengthening education, the development of a continuing education system and reinforcing the multi-level higher education system. The programme is a unique one, which sets out the fundamental principles of the reform strategy, outlines the problems and sets their priorities.

The aim of the programme is the fundamental reform of education system, the complete reversal of its ideological routine, elaboration of the national educational system for the training of highly qualified specialists up to the level of advanced democratic states. It is stated in the programme that one of the tasks to achieve the above aim is the development of a mutually beneficial international co-operation.

1.1. Implementation of the National Programme for Personnel Training

National Programme for Personnel Training (NPPT) was implemented in 3 stages. The first stage (1997-2001): a new legal, personnel, scientific-methodological and financial basis for reforming and developing the education system has been created; the implementation of the NPPT has become an integral part of the activities of all public, scientific, industrial and non-governmental structures; a new system of continuous education, including new types of SSE (professional colleges and academic lyceums) and two-level higher education has become fully operational.

As a result of structural reconstruction of education system and reorganization of existing educational institutions into academic lyceums and vocational colleges during the first phase of implementation (1997-2001) a number of 65 HEIs and approximately 1100 vocational colleges and academic lyceums have been established and functioning in Uzbekistan. Today total number of young people enjoying education in these educational institutions makes 1 million 220 thousand.

The second stage (2001-2005): this stage is aimed at full-scale implementation of NPPT and is based on monitoring the results of the previous years; it is particularly oriented to overall improvement of education quality and upgrading of pedagogical staff.

The third stage (2005-onwards): improvement and further development of the programme.

Reforms in the higher education sector of the country resulted into a switch on to a two-stage structure consisting of 4 years of Bachelor’s and 2 years of Master’s programme, as it is mentioned above. Post-higher education includes postgraduate courses and Doctors’ programme lasting 3 or more years. The reforms implemented in the Republic of Uzbekistan ensure integration of national continuous education system into international education community.

The Republican Fund of ‘Istedod’ (former ‘Ustoz’) is established to ensure the state support in professional development of teachers. More than 800 teachers had an opportunity to get their professional qualification developed and upgraded at universities of developed countries at the support of state grants. Furthermore over 3000 teachers took the advantage of grants funded by other institutions and enjoyed professional development. In addition almost 1000 teachers and specialists from foreign countries were invited to provide short term training courses in professional development for local pedagogical staff.

According to UNDP data in the academic year of 2005-2006 alone, over half billion US dollars was allocated from the state budget and extra-budgetary funds for implementing of the NPPT and the Programme of school education development.

2 Law “on Education”

Law “on Education” of the Republic of Uzbekistan was adopted on July 2, 1992. The priority of the sphere of education in social-economic, spiritual and cultural development is stated in the Law. The Law also includes the main guidelines of educational policy, structure and system of administration, as well as the rights and obligations of participants to education. Updated version was adopted by the Parliament in August 1997.

3. Structure of education system of Uzbekistan
Higher education in the Republic of Uzbekistan has an almost century-old history. The first real university - Turkestan State University- was opened in 1920. It was later renamed as the Tashkent State University and again it was in 1999 when it became the National University of Uzbekistan.

There are nowadays 65 higher educational institutions in Uzbekistan, including State Universities in each of the regional centres. The following international universities have been established in Uzbekistan: Westminster International University in Tashkent, branches of the Moscow State University named after M.V.Lomonosov and of the Russian Academy named after Plekhanov, the Russian University of Oil and Gas named after Gubkin, Singapore Institute of Management in Tashkent.

As yet there are no non-state universities in Uzbekistan, although the Law "On Education" adopted in 1997 provided a legal basis for such institutions.

4.2. Structure of higher education in Uzbekistan

Higher education is mainly co-ordinated and funded by the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialised Education (MHSSE). There are 34 Higher Educational Institutions (14 of them Universities, 20 – Institutes) accountable to MHSSE. There are still some highly specialised institutions, however, which come under other horizontal ministries. For example, the Ministry of Public Education has 5 pedagogical institutes, the Ministry of Public Health – 6, the Ministry of Culture – 5, the Ministry of Agriculture – 4 and so on. Several ministries have one educational institution each. The Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialised Education is the main methodological and coordinating body in higher education, which sets strict rules for the recognition of new developed curricula according to the state educational standards. According to information from the MHSSE the current total number of professors-teachers in 65 HEIs in Uzbekistan is more than 22.200.

According to UNDP (2007) there are, in total, 286.300 students, including 273.700 at the Bachelor’s level and 12.600 people at Master’s level. 69% of students study on a fee paid basis (individual contract) at the Bachelor’s level and 75% students study on a payed basis at the Master’s level. Since 2000 the number of new university students enrolling each year has increased by over a third , and the overall number of new university students enrolling each year has increased by over 1.5 times.

According to the National Programme for Personnel Training higher education is based on the secondary specialised education (academic lyceum), vocational specialised education (professional college) and includes 2 levels: a Bachelor’s degree level and Master’s degree level.

The Bachelor’s degree level is a basic higher education providing fundamental and applied knowledge according to speciality, with a period of study not less than 4 years. Upon completion of the Bachelor’s programme a graduate is conferred with the degree of bachelor and granted a diploma of the state pattern, which entitles him to start professional activity.

The Master’s degree level is higher education with fundamental and applied knowledge in a concrete field and lasts not less than 2 years on the basis of the Bachelor’s degree. Master’s degree holders are given a diploma of
the state pattern, which entitles the holder to work in his profession. It should be emphasized that only students who have studied for a Bachelor’s degree in a certain field may apply for the corresponding Master’s course.

4.3. Funding of Higher education

According to UNISEF survey (September 2007) Uzbekistan allocates 9% of GDP to educational needs. In Uzbekistan, individual institutions prepare budget bids which are submitted to and thereafter examined by the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialised Education. The total budget is aggregated and submitted to the Ministry of Finance, where a judgement about the total is made and sent back to the MHSSE, which then reallocates the final figures between its institutions. According to the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan finances derived from students’ paid contracts do not decrease the amount of financing from the budget and can be used entirely for the needs of the educational institution. According to the Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan on regulation and payment of students’ scholarships (Tashkent, 17.10.2001) a new procedure was introduced on provision of all students with scholarships (except foreign students) studying on budget or contractual basis. The amount of a monthly paid scholarship is included in the cost of the contract. The procedure is related also to Governmental Scholarships of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan and Government Scholarships named after Beruniy, Ibn Sino, Navoi and Ulugbek.

4.4. Accreditation procedure

The following procedure should be undertaken for accreditation of newly developed training courses or curricula:

- discussion and approval during the meeting of relevant Department (coherence with state educational standards);

- submission for the approval to Methodological Council (if it exists) or Scientific Council of the University or Institute;

- submission to the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialised Education.

If the existing courses have been improved or modernised there is no need to apply to the Ministry, they could be approved at the level of the Scientific Council of the University.

Usually new curriculum is developed by special groups of experts consisting of leading specialists of HEIs, Academy of Sciences and representatives of relevant branches of economy.

4.5. Admission to HEIs

Admission of students to Higher Education Institutions in Uzbekistan is carried out on the basis of state grants (budget) and individual contracts (fee paid basis).

Annually the Cabinet of Ministers issues a Resolution providing detailed information and requirements on enrolment at Higher Education Institutions. State Testing Centre under the Cabinet of Ministers is responsible for organisation of testing and development of testing materials. Uzbekistan is in the group of 10 countries using a modern testing system based on multiple choices. The testing is held on the 1st of August throughout the country for all types of HEIs.

The system of testing has been continuously improving during the last eight years: at the moment there is a database of qualified tests, which require from the applicants a deep knowledge and understanding of subjects, clear logic of thinking and other relevant skills. With the aim of improving the quality of testing materials and their broad approbation by pupils and teachers a special issue of “Ahborotnoma”- “Vestnik” is published every year by the State Testing Center. Only those who have actually passed testing at an adequate level are admitted and not anybody who is ready to pay.

There is no procedure for someone who passed the testing with top marks to choose a university or institute: s/he will be admitted to the HEI, where his/her application was submitted. The Universities decide whom they want to admit through the definition of minimum and maximum of total score of testing. (For example, the ranking list of 200 applicants includes the results in the range of 230-160. Only 50 people with total score from 230-195 are admitted on budget basis, other 50 people with results from 195-160 – on a contractual basis.)

If a student can’t get a state grant, in most cases the contract fee is paid by parents, companies or organisations.

In July 2001 according to the Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers of Uzbekistan a new system on provision of educational loans was introduced, which gave the opportunity for a number of students to be enrolled at HEIs throughout the republic. The Regulation states that educational loans are allocated to citizens of Uzbekistan, who have successfully passed the enrolment test and have been admitted to HEIs on a contractual basis. For orphans and handicapped persons the loans will be given without interest charges.
The prestige of higher education is constantly increasing. The State Testing Center informed that an unprecedented number of youths – 345,203 young people - have applied for admission to HEIs for academic year of 2007-2008. For comparison: the number of entrants in 2003 was 217,000; and in 2006 there were 314,000 of entrants registered.

The following priority areas of the Uzbek economy are taken into consideration when defining the quotas of the state order for future specialists:

- Agro-industrial complex
- Energy sector
- Telecommunications
- Chemical industry
- Food industry

According to UNDP data “a significant progress was made in high schools during the period 2000-2006 and in higher education admission to the Bachelor’s degree and Master’s degree courses grew by a factor of 1.3 and 2.0 respectively. It should be noted that the number of females entering higher education courses grew by more than 1.6 times...”

According to the Main Department of the State Budget of the Ministry of Finance, for academic year 2006/2007 general quotes for admission to the Bachelor’s degree courses made up 51,604 people (including on state grants 19,945 and on contractual basis – 31,659) and to the Masters’ programs – 6,500 (accordingly 1,500 and 5,000).

According to UNDP data in 2005/2006 the tuition fee for an undergraduate studying on a contract basis varied from 472,900 soums (pedagogical specialisation) including a monthly scholarship to 774,000 soums (law, international relations and international law), which is approximately per year.

4.6. Higher education reform

As it was already mentioned the unified policy for education is detailed in the National Programme for Personnel Training, which reinforces the multi-level higher education system and identifies the following areas as critical for the new system to become fully operational:

- to elaborate and introduce state educational standards for the Bachelor’s and Master’s degree levels,
- to train higher education teaching staff (including training abroad in the best universities),
- to conduct structural reform in higher education establishments,
- to improve the management, increase the independence of higher education establishments,
- to introduce the concept of public management through the creation of Boards of Founders,
- to elaborate and implement mechanisms of interaction between education, science and industry,
- to elaborate technologies for personalising education, means of open and distance education,
- to intensify the educational process by introducing the use of new pedagogical methodologies, information technologies and modular systems,
- to broaden the humanitarian base of education.

In order to maintain the academic level of each institution has to undergo a regular assessment in order to be accredited by the MHSSE. For the reforming period since 1997 the following target programmes have been developed and at the moment are being implemented:

- Training, retraining and professional development of pedagogical staff;
- Support of talented youth;
- Management of education system;
- Intellectual and moral development, enlightenment;
- Quality control and personnel competitiveness;
- Interaction between education, science and industry;
- Informational maintenance of educational process and scientific research.

For the last years the regulatory-methodological basis of a two-level higher education system have gone through an experimental approbation, including educational standards, curricula and syllabuses in all areas of the Bachelor’s and Master’s programmes. At present, the results of approbation are being analysed, the regulations are being improved and corrected.

Every 5 years the teaching staff of all types of HEIs has to undergo short-term retraining or upgrading courses. **Presidential decree of May 30, 2002** set forth new strategic directions and goals of ICT development in Uzbekistan. The Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan approved of the Program of development of Information and Communication Technologies for the period of 2003-2010 and provision of wide access to Internet. One of the main objectives of the programme will be to improve training specialists in the field of information and computer technologies in the republic, as well as to upgrade necessary computer skills of future specialists in all HEIs through ensuring facilities and access to Internet.
Considering experience gained from implementation of NPPT, development of the labour market and real social-economic conditions the following priority areas have been defined for further development of education system:

- wide introduction of new information technologies and modern pedagogical methodologies
- creation of republican information-educational network, which covers higher education institutions connected to Internet
- development and provision the academic lyceums, professional colleges and higher education establishments with updated teaching materials
- improvement of quality of training and retraining system of SSE pedagogical staff (about 160 000 teachers should be trained and retrained by 2010)
- upgrading of skills of university teaching staff, especially in the field of Engineering (oil, gas, textile, agriculture, civil engineering, automobile industry etc)
- improvement of forms and methods of labour marketing, analysis of demand for specific specialties of higher education
- introduction of quality assurance system
- creation of basis towards the Bologna process (ECTS).

4.7. Academic year in Uzbekistan

The academic year starts on September 2 and lasts until the end of June. The academic year is divided into two semesters:

1st - from early September to late December

2nd - from the beginning of February to the end of June. Although the duration of the semester can vary depending on the status of HEIs or on the study programme. For example, the 4th year students of the Bachelor’s programme finish their study in April.

4.8 important achievements in higher education system

- Priority of University Education
- Development and introduction of new education standards and curricula for Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees
- Increased level of education quality and protection of students interests:
  - written final control exams, rating system of evaluation of students’ knowledge,
  - lectures prepared using new textbooks and Internet are collected multiplied and stored in HEI libraries;
  - setup of the innovations fund;
  - regular attestation of teachers and their rating on the basis of attestation of educational institutions;
  - opening of the information portal (website) of the Ministry of HSSE,
- Introduction of the special curricula and courses
- Publication of normative-legal documents (about 100 quires).
- Establishment of the Westminster International University in Tashkent.
- Introducing of mechanisms of multi-channel financing and educational credits for students
- Bodies of public and self administration on the HEIs education system, Association of Rectors of Uzbekistan, Board of Trustees.
- Systematic retraining and professional development of teachers and staff of HEIs abroad
- Signing of Agreements on cooperation with more than 15 countries
- Attraction of specialists from foreign countries
- Attraction of foreign investments

4.9 Internationalisation & Globalisation

Internationalisation of higher education is given a high priority by the national authorities in Uzbekistan. Thanks to reached inter-governmental agreements, students can get educated at foreign universities. Moreover leading higher education institutions support close working relationships with universities in Germany, UK, USA and other countries.

Cooperation in higher education with Uzbek universities involved universities from 45 countries throughout the world.

International cooperation is one of the fastest and dynamic developing spheres of higher education in Uzbekistan.

International cooperation is ongoing in the following directions (based on data supplied by MHSSE):

- establishment of joint higher education institutions
- involvement of foreign teachers, scientists in the teaching process of Uzbek HEIs
- support for incoming and out-going student mobility
During International conference dedicated to "Quality assurance in higher education" (Tashkent, 1-2 November 2007) the following actions directed towards further development of higher education were presented:

1. Improvement of parameters and estimation criteria of the quality of education, development and introduction of computerized monitoring system and quality control of education and knowledge of students, into the sphere of higher education.
2. Development and implementation of modern and completely individualized system of raising qualification and retraining of personnel, with the purpose of formation of global thinking, global competence and global professionalism of pedagogical-scientific staff.
3. Revision of the contents of education on the basis of the principle of global thinking, global competence and global professionalism.
5. Development and realisation of virtual intellectual system of education.
6. Development and introduction of modern model of educational literature into practice
7. Development of the order and technique of formation of social order of legal state and civil society.
8. Development of the model of spiritually mature, ideologically stable and socially active person.
9. Development and introduction of diagnostics methods, criteria and parameters of evaluation of the level of spiritual maturity of youth into practice.
10. Development of the system of target preparation of applicants to the HEIs.
11. Creation and implementation of the technique on forecasting of understanding of disciplines into practice.
12. Development and implementation of the model of modern higher educational establishment into practice.

As for improvement of education system of the Republic for the processes of globalisation:

- Development of the conceptual program on integration of national educational system of Uzbekistan into the processes of globalisation, on the basis of the requirements of Bologna process;
- Unification of the list of the spheres of education and masters degree programs meeting international classificatory levels;
- Development of the conformity of curricula and programs with the samples of international level;
- Development of normative-legal, scientific and methodical basis of integration of education, science and industry.

There is a number of international organisations active in the field of education in the Republic of Uzbekistan:

- Asian Development Bank (ADB)
- Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)
- German Academic Exchange Programme (DAAD)
- British Council
- Korean International Cooperation Agency (KOICA)
- Goethe-Institute
- Konrad Adenauer Foundation
- World Bank
- Deutsche Gesellschaft fur Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ)
- UNESCO