



Uzbekistan – and Cambridge Assessment – put to the test



National strategy for development

Cambridge Assessment Admissions Testing designed an admissions test for four new Presidential Schools in Uzbekistan.

Four state-run, free boarding schools opened in Tashkent, Namangan, Khiva and Nukus in 2019. They specialise in teaching science, technology, engineering, art and maths (STEAM subjects) to 11 to 16-year-olds.

Not only was this a new age group for Admissions Testing, but it also had to translate the admissions test into three languages – including Karakalpak, an official language of Karakalpakstan, an autonomous region of Uzbekistan.

'We are delighted to be working on such an exciting, innovative project,' said Gwendydd Caudwell, Head of Development and Delivery at Admissions Testing.

Its involvement with the Central Asian country came about after Cambridge Assessment International Education was invited to work on the Presidential Schools Implementation Project. Cambridge International is providing the STEM part of the curriculum – which will be implemented alongside Uzbekistan's national curriculum – and delivering consultancy on teacher training and school leadership, as well as training teachers on the Cambridge curriculum.



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About Uzbekistan Presidential Schools

Uzbekistan Presidential Schools (UPS) are an initiative of the country's Ministry of Public Education intended to educate gifted and talented students, with the aim of developing students into critical thinkers and independent learners. Presidential Schools use a STEAM approach to learning and an IGCSE curriculum. Schools are located throughout Uzbekistan, with new campuses opened in Tashkent, Nukus, Namangan and Khiva.

About Admissions Testing Solutions

We develop and deliver tailored, research-based admissions solutions to meet specific requirements. We support governments, educational institutions and employers around the world to select applicants with the greatest potential for success, and provide applicants with an equal opportunity to show their potential. We work with you to understand your individual challenges, and provide solutions based on our extensive experience to help you achieve your strategic objectives.

About Cambridge Assessment Admissions Testing

We are part of the University of Cambridge and have been working with UK and worldwide universities, governments and employers for over 15 years. Our admissions assessments are a global mark of excellence that set the quality standard. Backed by extensive research, our admissions tests give your applicants the opportunity to prove they have what it takes and help enhance your selection process. We have a global network of centres that spans 150 countries, making it easy to assess applicants wherever they may be.

Uzbekistan President Shavkat Mirziyoyev plans to open a further five schools across the country in each of 2020 and 2021, as part of the national strategy for development.

'Cambridge International recognised that, with a prospective large number of registrations, there would be the need for an admissions test,' said Caudwell. 'Our assessment team worked closely with Cambridge International to understand their part of the brief and to ensure that, ultimately, everything worked well together.'

'We already had a model in place for a project in Kazakhstan, and the lessons we learned from developing this helped to inform the test design and delivery for Uzbekistan. It was an interesting project and we had to carefully consider the delivery requirements of the Ministry of Public Education.'

To ensure the admissions process would be regarded as fair, the ministry did not want to be involved in the conception or production of the test, or with the results. So, the tests were written in Cambridge, and the results processing and release was also done from the UK city.

'The ministry sourced venues and invigilators to support delivery, and the Uzbek team also managed registrations, candidate verification on test day, and so on,' said Caudwell. 'And, of course, they were busy building the schools and recruiting 144 teachers for them.'

The tests look to highlight candidates' problem-solving and critical-thinking skills, and have been delivered in three languages – Uzbek, Karakalpak and English.

In June and July 2019, 28,453 children sat the pre-selection maths test, and then 11,473 were selected for the main test. After the results were published in August, 576 students were offered school places in four regions. Successful children are offered places free of charge at these four boarding schools.

Review and refine

'The initiative is aimed at choosing the best children – the knowledgeable, talented children,' said Amirulla Abdullaev, Head of the Presidential Schools Implementation Project. 'The question papers were translated into the local languages to provide more opportunities for the brightest children to try to be among the Presidential School pupils. We did not want the English language to be the main selecting tool.'

Due to the success of this project, Admissions Testing will provide tests for the five additional Presidential Schools in 2020 with up to 140,000 candidates taking tests. In addition they will provide tests for the five schools planned for 2021 and will continue to do the admissions tests in existing schools at grade 5.

'Cambridge Assessment has a long-lasting reputation in organising and conducting this type of admissions test around the world in many different countries,' said Abdullaev.

'It's a very interesting project. It's challenging, but our colleagues from Cambridge Assessment are very co-operative and supportive, and I think it's very fruitful so far.'

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