New Voices from Uzbekistan

ed. Marlene Laruelle

Central Asia-Azerbaijan Fellowship Program
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THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
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According to a 2014 World Bank study,¹ the tertiary education system in Uzbekistan is one of the least efficient in the world. Although Uzbekistan has one of the highest shares of recent school graduates interested in pursuing higher education globally, the tertiary education system can absorb just 10 percent of its more than 500,000 applicants per year. The same study found that “[t]ertiary enrolment, at around 9 percent, is low by regional and international standards, and contrasts with nearly universal enrolment in primary and secondary levels in Uzbekistan.” For comparison, neighboring Kazakhstan has 53.25 percent enrollment in higher education.²

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of applicants</th>
<th>Number of admitted students</th>
<th>Admission rate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>729,707</td>
<td>65,875</td>
<td>9.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1. University admissions rate for the 2017-2018 academic year*

Source: State Testing Center website, www.dtm.uz, 2019

Official data on the exact number of higher education institutions in Uzbekistan is confusing. On its main webpage, the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education (MHSSE) claims to have 91 local higher education institutions and 8 foreign university branches.³ However, on its official news channel on Telegram,⁴ the Ministry issued a statement dated May 10, 2019, in which it confirmed that there were 85 local higher education providers and 17 foreign university branches.

The country does not currently have any universities in the overall Times Higher Education World University Rankings (even in the 801-1,000 bracket).⁵ Recent media discourse⁶ indicates that the MHSSE

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has begun discussions with the Times Higher Education Rankings on adding Uzbek higher education institutions. Obviously, before being ranked, the Uzbek higher education institutions must first meet the requirements of international ranking systems. They currently lack liberal admissions policies, market-based fees, and reputable international faculty members. Most importantly, higher education in Uzbekistan is completely detached from the needs of the economy in terms of skilled labor. While countries like Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have chosen to internationalize their higher education sectors, in Uzbekistan the authorities have been cautious as far as internationalization is concerned.

Since Shavkat Mirziyoyev became president in September 2016, the authorities have shown interest in reforming higher education. Deputy Prime Minister Aziz Abduhakimov gave an interview to a local news agency clarifying the government’s higher education policy. Among other things, he stated that “the Government [of Uzbekistan] is working on a concept for turning Uzbekistan into the education hub of Central Asia within the next 10 years.”¹ According to Uzbekistan’s Development Strategy for 2017-2021, “improving the quality and effectiveness of higher education institutions through the introduction of international standards of training and assessment of the quality of teaching, gradual increase in admission quota” is one of the top priorities.²

Recent reforms in the sector include a presidential decree issued on September 6, 2018, allowing online education at tertiary institutions. The same month, for the first time in the history of Uzbekistan, the government allowed local universities to admit an additional number of students after the university entrance exams were completed.³ Applicants who failed the entrance exams but achieved at least one-third of the maximum score on the exam can now gain admission by paying extraordinarily high fees ranging from US$10,000 to US$35,000 in the first year of enrollment. From the second year of enrollment onward, these students pay the usual fees (approx. US$1,000-2,000).

Among the most noticeable changes in the higher education sector in Uzbekistan is the proliferation of branches of foreign universities. Such branches were recently exempted from all taxes,⁴ which is expected to attract more players to the market. Indeed, universities from the US, Russia, South Korea, India, and China have already taken advantage of these favorable conditions to cash in on the high demand for tertiary education. The number of such branches almost tripled in recent years, from 7 in 2016 to 19 as of May 2019 (see Appendix 1).

While foreign universities are not new to the Uzbek higher education system, it should be noted that the Karimov government was very cautious about letting foreign universities in. It took 20 years to open the first seven branch-campuses, while the current government allowed seven new foreign universities to open branches within the space of three months. While the above-mentioned changes are long overdue, recent developments show that there is a lack of a well-thought-out reform strategy in the sector, and the proliferation of foreign university branches seems to be the least-planned of these developments.

This article analyzes how the growing number of foreign university branches in the country fit into the broader trend of Higher Education (HE) reforms in Uzbekistan and what challenges as well as opportunities this trend may create. This research is important as it opens up a conversation about potential reforms in HE and suggests reforming the old Soviet-style HE management and governance. It seems clear that Uzbekistan wants to reform its higher education system, however the government does

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not have a clear strategy or publicly available selection criteria on the basis of which it establishes branches of foreign universities.

The subject has not been studied by academics thus far. Until recently, Uzbekistan was closed to the majority of academic research. Iveta Silova, a prominent scholar of Central Asian education studies, studied private tutoring across the entire region but could not access Uzbekistan. Most of the academic articles that exist on the education system of Uzbekistan in particular are focused on rudimentary reforms in the higher education sector and limited to description. The remainder likewise have clear shortcomings. While Ruziev and Burkhanov claim that the introduction of a centrally administered testing system to higher education admissions in 1994 replaced the corrupt Soviet-style oral and written examinations conducted in individual universities in Uzbekistan, they fail to note that the centralized testing system has been found to be no less corrupt than the old system. Another group of scholars studied the redevelopment of higher education in post-Soviet Central Asia in comparative perspective, but they failed to provide a comprehensive study of Uzbekistan’s higher education internationalization policy in the post-independence period.

There is, however, a good body of social research by international organizations on HE in Uzbekistan that, based on various factual evidence, lays out concrete steps toward modernizing and liberalizing the HE sector. That being said, their findings are limited to recommendations on how to improve tertiary education, and thus neglect to study how the Uzbek Government’s reliance on opening foreign university branches is affecting the country’s higher education sector as a whole. The current literature on HE in Central Asia in general, and in post-Soviet Uzbekistan in particular, fails to cover Uzbekistan’s model of “imported internationalization” of HE in the form of foreign university branches and how this affects the national tertiary sector.

The present research does not focus on the overall or individual performance of any foreign university branch in Uzbekistan. Nor does it aim to assess the academic or non-academic achievements of students graduating from branches of foreign universities. Analysis of the curriculum or governance of an

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individual institution is outside the scope of this research. Instead, this paper looks at how the trend of opening foreign university branches at a rapid pace while being slow to reform the stagnant national sector may affect the country's tertiary education sector, looking at what challenges and opportunities this may create. It argues that sustainable higher education reform in Uzbekistan needs to go beyond the current reliance on opening branches of foreign universities.

In order to support this argument, the paper will first look at how HE providers in Uzbekistan reached their current stagnation. Second, it will use discourse analysis of the current government policy (official documents, statements, legislation) as well as semi-structured interviews with tertiary education teaching staff and specialists on establishing foreign university branches to answer its research question. The interviews were held with current teaching staff at two local universities (for the privacy and safety of respondents, the names of the universities are not mentioned) and with the management and teaching staff of two leading foreign university branches in Uzbekistan. Interviews were also held with an anonymous Uzbek government official and with an American Councils for International Education expert working on Uzbekistan's HE internationalization project.

Higher Education in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Uzbekistan emerged as an independent state with its own model of transition from the Soviet-style planned economy to a market economy. The country's HE was profoundly affected by the disintegration of the Soviet Union, as higher education "was more fully integrated across the Union" than some other sectors. As Uzbekistan was no longer receiving funding from Moscow for social programs as well as education and research, it had to consider restructuring its education system in a way that aligned with its political and economic agenda. Among other socio-economic reforms, transition-era reforms included the reorganization of the structure and curriculum of HE institutions. While Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan opted for "mass higher education enrollment," Uzbekistan seemed to prefer to keep HE an "elite" system with lower enrollment rates. Throughout this process, the Uzbek government maintained complete control over the HE sector; the reforms that took place were of "top-down" nature.

On its path to redevelop the education system, the Government of Uzbekistan adopted a first Law on Education in 1992. In 1997, the "National Program for Personnel Training"—another legal basis for the operation of the education system, which represents a long-term strategy of reinforcing the education system—was adopted. Uzbekistan introduced a National Quality Assurance system known as State Standards for Higher Education (Oliy ta'limning davlat ta'lim standartlari) in 2001, but the system as a whole remains under strict government control. Uzbekistan has not given up on improving the accessibility of higher education but has done it in its own peculiar way: it increased the number of national tertiary education providers, but did not necessarily want the Kyrgyz, Kazakh, or Eastern European modes of internationalization and privatization of the HE sector. For instance, the number of higher education institutions in Uzbekistan increased from 43 in 1989 to 78 by 2015. However, this

1 Brunner and Tillett, "Higher Education in Central Asia," 8.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Ruziev and Burkhanov, “Uzbekistan: Higher Education Reforms.”
success has been undermined by the increase in the size of the population, which has grown from 20 million in 1990 to 31 million in 2015. The net result is that access to higher education has in fact declined. Indeed, demand for higher education is almost ten times higher than supply, leading to very high corruption at the administrative level of the higher education system in Uzbekistan.1

Perhaps the biggest impediment to the de-Sovietization of higher education in Uzbekistan has been the government’s approach to reforms. Uzbekistan’s “gradualist approach to transition was unique in terms of the pace, sequencing, and prioritization of reforms, resulting in the so-called ‘Uzbek model’2 of economic development.”3 The impact of this approach on higher education can be summarized as state dirigism (in particular, tertiary education as a function of the state only and higher education as citizenry education, not an individual right for each citizen) and gradualism (extreme caution with regard to changes and lack of a clear timeline of reforms). This strictly authoritarian approach to reforms did not lead to improvement in any area of the HE sector, from enrollment rates to the quality of the centrally-dictated curriculum.

Furthermore, “[s]imilar to Uzbekistan’s political and economic reform processes, the creation of educational laws and the stages of reform have been very centralized.”4 Ultimately, due to the slow and centralized nature of reforms, Uzbekistan has suffered stagnation in terms of access to HE, management and governance of the HE sector, the independent review of individual faculties/schools within HE institutions, staff retention, and student experience, as well as financing issues. A World Bank report on Uzbekistan’s higher education, conducted in 2014, concluded that the country’s general approach to HE reforms has been top-down and strictly centralized, offering little or no autonomy to local institutions on matters concerning course design, student intake, and management of their finances—a plethora of issues that might take years to address.5

Foreign University Branches in Uzbekistan: A Sign of Reform?

In contrast to the slow and non-market-based reforms of the sector over the past two decades, the rapid growth in the number of foreign universities in Uzbekistan is indeed a sign of willingness to reform. However, how sustainable is this type of reform? How do foreign universities fit into the higher education system? Which of the existing issues are these foreign universities expected to address? So far, the government does not appear to have clear answers to these questions.

The Law on Education6 and the National Program for Personnel Training (the National Program) are legal bases for the national policy in the field of education. A review of the Law on Education reveals that there is no reference to establishing foreign university branches nor to their operation in the country. The Law, however, states that:

The education system of the Republic of Uzbekistan consists of: state and non-state educational institutions that implement educational programs in accordance with state educational standards.

It is not clear whether foreign university branches fall under the umbrella of “non-state educational institutions.” The only reference to foreign educational institutions is in Article 33, which provides that:

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2 The five pillars of the “Uzbek model” of development were the priority of economy over politics, the state as the only reformer, the supremacy of law, gradualism of reforms rather than shock therapy, and strong social policy.
4 Weidman and Yoder, “Policy and Practice in Education Reform,” 60.
5 World Bank, “Uzbekistan: Modernizing Tertiary Education.”
Educational institutions participate in international cooperation on educational issues, have the right to establish direct links with relevant educational institutions of foreign countries, to create joint educational institutions with them in the order prescribed by law.

Although the Article states that educational institutions can establish direct links with foreign educational institutions, it does not cover the completely separate case of foreign university branches operating in the country as autonomous higher education institutions. The Article further states that “The education system of the Republic of Uzbekistan is unified and continuous,” which again makes it ambiguous as to whether the law envisions the current lack of synergy between national higher education providers and “internationalized” branches of various foreign universities. To put it simply, the Law on Education does not address the internationalization of Uzbekistan’s higher education sector in general and the establishment of branches of foreign universities in particular.

The National Program,\(^1\) adopted by the Parliament of the Republic of Uzbekistan, represents a long-term strategy to reinforce the education system. It lists the goals, tasks, and stages of the development of the national model of education, from primary education to post-graduate education. Yet, the program does not refer to the internationalization of the country’s higher education system through the opening of foreign university branches, nor does it provide an explanation of how such institutions fit into Uzbekistan’s current system. This clearly shows that the establishment of foreign university branches at such a pace was not envisaged at the time that the strategic documents on higher education were written.

Other important legal documents governing the development of the HE system include Decrees of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan and Resolutions of the Cabinet of Ministers of Uzbekistan. The Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan on the Adoption of State Educational Standards for Higher Education\(^2\) mentions that one of the purposes of adopting these standards is to integrate Uzbekistan into the global educational system. However, once again, the resolution makes no mention of the roles/responsibilities of foreign university branches with regard to meeting these standards.

This review of the existing documents shows that Uzbekistan’s current HE policy includes no legal basis for—and no clear strategy or policy on—establishing foreign university branches. As such, the various foreign university branches that are operating in the country using their own admissions policies, curricula, strategies, and governance, not to mention their own budget models, are emerging as a parallel system to the national higher education system. To illuminate this point, a detailed comparison of the governance of a national higher education institution (Uzbek State World Languages University) and a foreign university branch (Management Development Institute of Singapore) is provided in Appendix 4.

This reality reinforces the paper’s argument that HE reforms in Uzbekistan cannot be sustainable by relying on the opening of foreign university branches alone.

### Two Parallel Higher Education Systems: Long-Term Goals vs. Short-Term Gains

Among studies on the internationalization of education, there is a belief that foreign university branches are perceived to be “a single thing that can magically solve educational woes.”\(^3\) The current trend of opening foreign university branches without a solid legislative basis for their operation, as well as without a clear strategy, does indeed give the impression that the government wants to fix higher education issues

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in the country by opening branches of foreign universities. However, the authorities are not paying attention to—or are closing their eyes to—the fact that these branches are in the country for commercial reasons rather than to bring any improvement to Uzbekistan’s stagnant national higher education system.

The official information on the number of branches of foreign universities in Uzbekistan and on the process by which they were established is not reliable. For example, on April 6, 2018, it was reported that the Uzbek Ministry of Preschool Education had signed an agreement to set up a branch of Seojon University in Tashkent. Several news outlets covered this agreement. However, more than a year after the agreement was apparently signed, Seojon University is still not on the MHSSE’s list of branches of foreign universities currently operating in the country. As such, there is no way to say whether the branch has been opened or not.

This shows how disorganized the Ministry itself is with regards to its foreign university branch policy. It also shows that new branches are being established haphazardly. Often, this disorganization reflects the fact that agreements with foreign universities are being initiated by Uzbek embassies around the world, and not necessarily by the MHSSE itself. Moreover, the Ministry’s most recent list of foreign university branches did not include Yeoju University—a branch that is already operating in the country. This fact is another example of the uncoordinated nature of the so-called “internationalization” of higher education in Uzbekistan.

With its current policy, the government seems to be seeking an immediate solution for addressing the low quality of its Soviet-style higher education without committing to long-term strategic reforms. The opening of foreign university branches might be perceived by the government as an immediate step toward improving the image of the sector. However, this trend is creating two parallel yet very distinct higher education systems. Drawing on interviews with the staff of local universities as well as the staff of foreign university branches, this paper identifies several huge differences in the teaching and operations of national universities and foreign university branches that have caused the emergence of two parallel systems.

My research revealed that local state universities do not have the academic and financial autonomy that foreign university branches currently enjoy. Although the government says it plans to make local universities academically and financially autonomous, such independence is not currently a reality. The second gap between the two systems is in international standards of teaching and learning. Students at branches of foreign universities have a choice of elective courses in addition to their major, whereas in state universities all subjects are compulsory and students do not have any exposure to international standards of teaching and academic support. Third, differences in managing and internationalizing the teaching staff of local universities and foreign university branches is a key issue that contributes to the development of two completely different, parallel higher education systems. Last but not least, there is a huge gap in student experience and employability between local universities and foreign university branches. The current HE policy does not indicate that local universities are going to adopt the governance and teaching practices of the foreign university branches.

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3 Anonymous government official, personal interview with the author, April 2019.

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Autonomy—Academic and Financial

Foreign university branches in Uzbekistan have complete autonomy over their academic curriculum and financial management. As confirmed by a leading government official, foreign university branches decide what courses to teach and which textbooks to use for any given degree program. The same government official observed that the government of Uzbekistan does not ask foreign university branches to add any courses to their academic programs. A member of the teaching staff at a leading foreign university branch in Tashkent confirmed that not only do universities and faculties enjoy autonomy, but so too do academic staff in teaching their courses. My interviews revealed that the leading foreign university branch does not teach pro-government courses such as Ma’naviyat about nation-building or identity formation.

For their part, local universities follow the MHSSE’s rules and regulations both for curriculum and finances. Nor is the MHSSE the only actor determining the finances of a local university. Other players include the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Economy. My interviews indicate that staff in local higher education institutions spend a lot of time preparing unnecessary reports to submit to the MHSSE. In fact, they spend less time on lesson planning than they do on preparing the constant stream of paperwork demanded by higher offices. Local universities lack the academic and financial autonomy that foreign university branches currently enjoy. This is where the two separate and yet parallel systems of higher education begin to emerge.

International Standards of Teaching and Learning

In the world of foreign university branches, students are taught an international curriculum that is designed to fit the degree they will be getting. Students in such institutions also have the right to choose electives in addition to courses compulsory for their major. Testing and assessment during the course of the study are completed in line with international standards (as per my interviews with current and former students of foreign university branches in Uzbekistan). Students are taught the basics of academic writing from the outset and are warned that plagiarism is a breach of academic conduct. If anyone is caught engaging in academic misconduct, they fail that exam/assignment, just like in most international contexts.

In national higher education institutions, meanwhile, students still attend classes from Monday to Saturday and the schedule is set up by the Faculty/School Management. All classes are compulsory and there is no choice of electives.¹ The assignments and the quality of examination processes are quite different from those in foreign university branches. Most teaching staff, much less students, are not aware of academic writing standards. There are no software programs to check the level of plagiarism in students’ writing assignments, nor is there support for students to acquire academic writing skills. In such educational settings, students’ writing assignments can easily be copied and pasted from any source without proper acknowledgment.

Teaching Methods and Culture

In most, if not all, national higher education institutions, teaching methods and classroom settings are Soviet-style. Student are obliged to attend all lectures. Student are also expected to respect and follow the instructions of the lecturer. This shows the dominance of collectivist culture in national higher education institutions. Moreover, in local universities, the management seem to pay more attention to whether students are wearing appropriate attire than to the teaching quality of the faculties. As a staff member at a local university mentioned, “...students are strictly checked for their uniforms. [Women] are encouraged to

¹ My interviews indicated that the University of World Economy and Diplomacy and Tashkent State University of Law (TSUL) have introduced elective courses for their students.
wear a top and a skirt. No fancy clothing or skinny pants are allowed. Only in winter (when it is cold) are students allowed to wear classic black pants to the University.”

At branches of foreign universities, teaching methods and classroom attendance policies are quite different from in the national sector. Courses are designed to deploy student-centered teaching methods. In some universities, students are not obliged to attend the lectures of their elective subjects; they can access all course information, including the recorded lecture, online on online learning platforms (similar to Moodle or Wattle). Moreover, unlike in the national sector, foreign university branches have international teaching staff who encourage students to develop their critical thinking skills. Even the local staff working in foreign university branches are trained to teach students to question ideas and concepts. If national institutions teach students what to think, students in foreign university branches are taught how to think. This difference is subsequently reflected in the academic and professional activities of learners.

International Faculty and Staff Retention

While it is true that not all faculty members in foreign university branches are internationally recruited staff, there are international teaching staff in every foreign university branch. They usually teach the core subjects/courses in which the branch specializes. Even the local staff working in foreign university branches are well trained, with qualifications from European or American universities. Foreign university branches try to attract leading international faculty to improve their rankings in the market—and they offer much higher salaries and more favorable work conditions than public universities do. They develop staff retention strategies to keep the best and most talented professors in their institutions, including offering professional development opportunities to local staff. As a result, students in foreign university branches are exposed to international and intercultural perspectives throughout their studies.

In most local universities, staff often work under pressure to prepare all the necessary reports for the Ministry. Local universities and institutes do not try to compete with branches of foreign universities in terms of attracting the best researchers/professors in the field. Nor do they care about retaining existing faculty members. As an interview with a member of staff at a foreign university branch revealed:

Lecturers here at X university are paid considerably better than in local universities. But salary is not the real motivator. Most locally hired lecturers stay at foreign university branches because they like working in an environment where they have autonomy, learning opportunities, and free time! They simply don’t want to waste time on preparing useless and endless reports to the Center.”

Thus, the differences in the management and internationalization of the teaching staff of local and foreign university branches is another key issue that contributes to the development of two completely different higher education systems operating in parallel.

Student Experience and Employability

In most foreign university branches, students are encouraged to take advantage of academic support to get academic advice during their studies. Moreover, they have access to a quality wifi connection while on campus and can use up-to-date library collections. Students at branches of foreign universities are often exposed to international speakers on various topics relevant to their degrees. They are also encouraged to find and apply for internship opportunities. Students receive career counseling as part of the student experience, and on completion of their degrees, they are usually awarded a diploma (or two diplomas) that is valid both in Uzbekistan and abroad (usually in the country from whence the foreign university branch

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1 Staff member at a local university based in Tashkent, personal interview with the author, Tashkent, April 2019.
originates). This allows them to be more competitive than their peers who studied at local higher education institutions.

It is unclear what the situation is when it comes to national higher education providers, especially those located in remote provinces. However, interactions with teaching staff in several national higher education institutions show that students in the national sector do not seem to have even a decent free internet connection on campus, let alone other privileges. Staff from local universities confirmed for instance that there was wifi on their campus, but “it would only open the webpages approved by the web team of the University.” Unfortunately, the fact that a university should not only offer classes but also provide a positive student learning experience is little-known and receives limited attention in local universities. Interviews with staff from national universities give the impression that the concept of “student experience” is not even considered in local settings.

As long as students are attending lessons and sitting exams/submitting papers, then everything is as it should be. Career counseling or advice on internship placements are not normally provided by local universities. Students usually reach out to themselves to potential employers and try to develop networks while enrolled in their studies. On completion of their studies, students receive a diploma that is valid only in Uzbekistan. Due to their lack of independence and limited capacity to internationalize their programs, Uzbek universities are not actively establishing partnerships for dual-degree programs/articulation programs. Thus, students at local universities continue to be disadvantaged in terms of career guidance and potential employment opportunities.

The emergence of two parallel Higher Education systems is creating a number of issues that the government and society will need to face. As indicated above, the creation of foreign university branches is not a sustainable way to reform or “internationalize” the sector. In other words, foreign university branches are not solving the issues of the national higher education sector. The national sector will continue to operate in a Soviet-style manner while the government opens its arms to foreign universities/branches. It will thus further stagnate, and students of national universities will continue to be disadvantaged in comparison to students in foreign university branches. To address the issues created by the emergence of these parallel yet unequal higher education systems, local higher education institutions should be subject to the same liberalization policy. The reform should ensure that each local higher education provider independently decides its own finances, curriculum, internationalization strategy, and staff retention and student experience policies. The final section of this paper contains targeted policy recommendations for how to re-structure Uzbekistan’s national higher education sector.

**Conclusion**

The government of Uzbekistan is willing to provide wider access to higher education. There are signs of reform in the sector, mostly coming top-down from the Cabinet of Ministers, not necessarily the Ministry of Higher Education. The official discourse represents the proliferation of foreign universities in Uzbekistan as a sign of the reform and internationalization of the sector. However, there is as yet no publicly available legal basis for the operation of foreign university branches in the country. Nor is there a clear government strategy in relation to these institutions; the process looks quite haphazard. If the current trend continues, it may end up dividing Uzbekistan’s higher education sector between a modernized, liberal foreign system and an old-fashioned, isolated, and low-quality national system. Such a division would make the national system even poorer, detached from internationalization and the job market and able to attract only a low-quality cohort of students. To avoid the emergence of two parallel higher education systems, the government should elaborate a comprehensive higher education reform strategy.

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1 Staff member at a local higher education institution, personal interview with the author, Tashkent, April 2019.
Policy Recommendations

The findings of this research indicate that there is an urgent need to reconsider and re-structure the current Soviet-style higher education system of Uzbekistan. This study provides feasible policy recommendations to government and other stakeholders for completely restructuring the sector.

In my view, the first step toward reforming the sector is the establishment of a working group under the Cabinet of Ministers of Uzbekistan consisting of leading higher education specialists, academics, and consultants. This working group should study successful higher education structures in leading states—i.e., the US, Australia, and the UK—within a defined timeframe. The Working Group should then present the government with a Higher Education Reform Package.

On the basis of my findings, I recommend that the reforms should first address the structure or hierarchy of the Higher Education Ministry. Whereas there are currently multiple players involved in higher education reform (including the Social Complex of Cabinet of Ministers for overall management of the sector and the Ministry of Finance for the sector's finances and budgets), I recommend that the Ministry of Higher Education be made the only government agency responsible for higher education. The Ministry can then set up/reform agencies and institutes under its portfolio. The Higher Education Reform Package should include:

- Making universities self-governing bodies (with their own budget models and curricula).
- Developing an internationalization policy that will formalize the process for establishing foreign university branches to make it more consistent. Individual universities can use this policy to develop their own local internationalization strategies for establishing international partnerships with universities worldwide.
- Encouraging universities, as autonomous institutions, to have Boards through which the best candidates are selected for management positions. Rectors should not be appointed by the Cabinet of Ministers. Management positions within universities should be announced publicly in order to attract quality applicants from around the world.
- Allowing universities to work with industry and business to attract funds and encouraging academic staff to attract funds/grants for their research. Writing instructors and research management teams will be required in order for academics to gain the skills necessary to write good grant proposals.
- Adopting a policy on credit and grading in higher education that aligns with international credit standards.
- Rewriting position descriptions of academic appointments in HE institutions to include teaching, research, and other services to the university; introducing a compulsory research component to most academic appointments.
## Appendix 1. Foreign university branches already operating in the market

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Foreign University Branch and year of its establishment</th>
<th>Main teaching areas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plekhanov Russian University of Economics (since 1995)</td>
<td>Economics, Business, and Finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westminster University (UK) (since 2002)</td>
<td>Business/Management/Marketing, Business Information Systems, Commercial Law, Economy/Finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lomonosov Moscow State University (Russia) (since 2006)</td>
<td>Applied Mathematics and Informatics, and Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gubkin Russian State University of Oil and Gas (since 2007)</td>
<td>Oil and Gas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management Development Institute of Singapore (since 2007)</td>
<td>Business and Management, Engineering, Fashion Design, Information Technology, Life Sciences, Mass Communications, Psychology and Travel, Tourism and Hospitality Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turin Polytechnic University (Italy) (since 2009)</td>
<td>Mechanical and Energy Engineering; Information Technology and Automation Systems in Industry (ICT); Industrial and Civil Engineering and Architecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inha University (South Korea) (since 2014)</td>
<td>Computer Science and Engineering, Information and Communication Engineering, Logistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Yeoju Technical Institute in Tashkent (YTIT) (South Korea) (7-8 September 2018) *This university, interestingly, is not on the official list of foreign universities (or branches) of the MHSSE. The university has been operating since July 2018.</td>
<td>Architecture and Urban Planning; Alternative Energy; Business Management; Tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Webster University (US) (since September 5, 2018)</td>
<td>Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL). The degree is offered jointly by Webster University and a local partner university – Uzbek State University of World Languages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moscow Institute of Steel and Alloy (Russia) (since September 24, 2018)</td>
<td>Mining; Metallurgy; Automatization and Management of Technological Processes and Production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Branch of Information Systems Management Institute (Latvia, since September 28, 2018)</td>
<td>The Branch was established in Ferghana. The following faculties were listed in the local media: Undergraduate courses: Tourism, Hotel Management, Management of Cultural Heritage, Small Business Management, IT Master’s courses: Business Management, Information Systems</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Amity University (India, since October 3, 2018)  The local media spread the news that negotiations on opening a branch of Amity University in Uzbekistan had started.

Moscow State Institute of International Relations (Russia, October 4, 2018)  On October 4, 2018, the Rector of Moscow State Institute of International Relations visited Uzbekistan, where he held talks about the establishment of a School of International Relations within the University of World Economy and Diplomacy (Uzbekistan).

Branch of Bucheon University in Tashkent (South Korea, July 2018)  The Branch was established by the Decree of the President dated July 2, 2018. It offers preschool education degrees.

Branch of National Nuclear Research University under Moscow Institute of Engineering and Physics (Russia, July 10, 2018)  Uzbekistan and Russia agreed to open the branch of the National Nuclear Research University, which was recently founded in Russia on the premises of the renowned Moscow Institute of Engineering and Physics. Students will be admitted from academic year 2019-2020.

Ajou University in Uzbekistan (not a Branch) (South Korea, November 30, 2018)  Undergraduate degrees in Architecture or Construction Engineering commencing from academic year 2019-2020.

Branch of Moscow University of Physical Training, Swimming, Youth and Tourism in Samarkand region (February 13, 2019)  More than 150 students will be accepted in the 2019-2020 academic year to programs on volleyball, basketball, tennis, swimming, etc.

Sharda University Branch in Andijan region (India, April 2019)  An agreement was signed at the Embassy of Uzbekistan in India between the Khokim of Andijon region and the Head of Sharda Group.

Source: compiled by the author based on local media and university websites.

Appendix 2. List of Local Private Universities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Akfa University</td>
<td>Gachon University and Akfa Medline signed an agreement on opening the branch of Gachon University's College of Medical Science—currently known as Akfa University—in Uzbekistan. The admissions to 6-year undergraduate studies will commence in 2019. The newly-established Akfa University will run Gachon’s academic programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program offered by Gachon University (South Korea, partnership since October 3, 2018)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix 3. Foreign University Branches that have signed agreements with the Uzbek Government to operate in the country (as of May 2019)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Gerasimov Institute of Cinematography (Russia)</td>
<td>July 25, 2018—President of Uzbekistan ordered that an agreement be reached with the Russian side to open a branch of the institute in Tashkent in 2020. Negotiations are planned to start in December 2018.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Branch of Nanjing Polytechnic Institute (China)</td>
<td>It is planned that the languages of instruction will be English and Chinese</td>
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<tr>
<td>Branch of “Universiti Teknologi Malaysia—UTM” (Malaysia Technological University, Malaysia)</td>
<td>Negotiations were held on January 27, 2019.</td>
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<tr>
<td>University of Technology (China)</td>
<td>The Chinese side visited the country for negotiations on January 25, 2019.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Branch of Kyung-in Women's University (South Korea)</td>
<td>An MoU on establishing this Branch was signed on April 20, 2019. The Branch will focus on program such as textile, design, fashion, aviation and tourism, health care, and Korean studies.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Branch of Turkish Healthcare Studies University on the premises of Bukhara State Medical Institute (Turkey)</td>
<td>The agreement with the Turkish side on opening this branch in the 2019-2020 academic year was signed on April 1, 2019.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Branches of Moscow Oncological Research Institute in Tashkent and Samarkand (Russia, news from April 25, 2019)</td>
<td>The news on negotiations with the Russian side was published on April 25, 2019.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Branch of Seojeong University in Tashkent (South Korea, April 6, 2018)</td>
<td>An MoU was signed on April 6, 2018.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Appendix 4. Number of Players in Public and Foreign University Branches: Comparison of UzSWLU with MDIS**

Uzbekistan State University of World Languages is the leading public university for foreign language teaching in the country.

Management Development Institute of Singapore in Tashkent (MDIS) is one of the older foreign university branches in the country, having been operating successfully since 2007. MDIS has complete autonomy as long as it meets National Quality Assurance Standards.

**Table 1. Number of players in governance of UzSWLU**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Responsibilities include</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Cabinet of Ministers | • Development of strategy for the HE sector  
• Determining the quotas for entrance to HEIs  
• Setting the stipends for all students  
• Appointments of Rectors of HEIs |
| MHSSE (Higher Education Ministry) | • Consolidating annual budget bids prepared by HEIs  
• Reallocation of annual budget funds (approved by the Ministry of Finance) between HEIs  
• Organizing the academic year (length of semesters, dates of examinations and holidays) |
| Ministry of Finance | • Approval of consolidated annual budget of HEI |
| Ministry of Economy | • Forecasting market demand for different sectors, which becomes |
the basis for setting admission quotas to HEIs (determined in consultation with MHSSE and MLSP)

State Testing Centre
- Developing and organizing national testing for admission to HEIs

*Source: UzWLU website and interviews with UzSWLU staff*

**Table 2. Number of players in governance of MDIS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Responsibilities include</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>MDIS BOARD OF DIRECTORS</strong></td>
<td>• Development of MDIS’s strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Determining admission caps</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Appointment of Vice-President</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Developing budget models</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Research and innovation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Student recruitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Student experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Student employability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: MDIS website and interviews with MDIS staff*