Workforce Development in Kazakhstan: The Role of University Career Centers

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Abstract

This paper explores the different strategies that university career centers in Kazakhstan employ to prepare students to make informed decisions in their professional career choices, and the role that career centers can play in workforce development. I argue that successful approaches to workforce development include increasing career center services’ accessibility and visibility, and promoting initiatives where career exploration and preparation are integrated into university programming throughout the student lifecycle. For example, positive career preparedness outcomes are evidenced when universities invite employers to take an active role on campus, from speaking as guest lecturers in classes, to sponsoring student case study competitions, to recruitment via information sessions and job fairs. The paper considers the feedback loop from industry, and argues that career centers working closely with industry partners can increase the number of high-quality experiences available to students. The paper is based primarily on a survey of university career center staff from throughout Kazakhstan, as well as follow on interviews with select career center staff and Kazakhstani professionals. The paper also draws from public materials including international professional competency frameworks, as well as the author’s experience working closely with a career center for four years at a university in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The paper provides the international development and higher education community with pragmatic recommendations for developing and adapting career services to help to increase students’ employability and workforce preparedness.

**Keywords:** workforce development, workforce preparedness, career centers, employability competencies, higher education, Kazakhstan, Central Asia, Eurasia
“Career Centres have a fundamental role to play in higher education institutes as a source of information on the transition from the university to the labor market, contributing on the one hand to orient graduates in the labor market, and on the other hand to promote the university’s social capital in the industrial fabric, making both systems (university + enterprise) more attractive to each other.”

University career centers worldwide play an important role in assisting students with the education to work transition, and in preparing students to secure internships and seek employment opportunities. Career center activities are varied throughout the academic year, and range from individual one-on-one counseling appointments with students, to large all-university events such as career fairs or employer recruitment sessions. In the United States, for example, the services most offered by career centers tend to be career counseling for students, career workshops, assistance with securing internships, career assessment tools, and liaising with academic departments to assist internship-seeking students.

The impact of a university career center depends upon many internal and external factors, from university management support, resources including staffing and budget, buy-in from students and alumni, strength of connections to industry, sectoral demands and the state of the economy. Stakeholders essential to the success of a university career center, both within the university structure and in terms of external engagement, include university leadership, university faculty and staff, employers, students, alumni, and of course, career center staff.

The goal of this paper is to illustrate how career centers at Kazakhstani universities can play a pivotal role in improving students’ workforce preparedness. The paper seeks to assess the current state of career services in Kazakhstan, recognizing that there are of course major disparities between public and privately funded universities, as well as regional differences in a country as vast as Kazakhstan. The paper reviews career services provided at a number of universities throughout Kazakhstan, and touches upon synergies in work that international and multilateral organizations have taken recently to address workforce preparedness in Kazakhstan. The paper examines areas where career center directors have identified they would like more training or additional resources. Finally, the paper concludes with recommendations to senior university management and donor agencies interested in investing in capacity building for career centers to strengthen workforce preparedness among university students in Kazakhstan, and more broadly, Central Asia and the Eurasian space.

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Key Findings of the Paper Include:

► **Training, seminars and master classes** related to employability competencies emerged unanimously as the **top services** that career centers provide to students to help prepare them for employability and job competitiveness.

► Companies in Kazakhstan note that **crucial skills for students entering the workforce are soft skills** including teamwork, presentation skills, adaptability and creativity, and **hard skills** including software skills (with an emphasis on Excel), and English.

► Students would benefit from more **hands-on activities** putting theory into practice, both in the classroom and through extracurricular activities, such as case study competitions and problem based learning activities.

► While actual employment data from **university career fairs** varies widely among universities, one emerging trend is to utilize fairs and employer engagement activities as a way to prepare students for internships and employability.

► University career center staff identified a **need for further training** in areas including student counselling, social media, working with data, and alumni engagement to help their mission in positioning students for career success.

► Career center staff expressed an interest in a revived **national association of career centers** that could serve as a leading source of information for employment, hiring trends, training, and best practices.

### Brief History - Career Centers at Kazakhstani Institutes of Higher Education

Career and advising centers at institutes of higher education in Kazakhstan are a relatively new phenomenon. During the Soviet period, university graduates were assigned a position based on their specialty and industry requirements. As such, there was no need for an office or unit that would work with students to aid them in their efforts to gain employment. Open borders, new professions, and advancement in technology have changed the picture considerably over the past two decades. Among the universities polled in this survey, career centers were established as early as 1995 (KIMEP University) to as recently as 2015 (Kokshetau State University and KazGUU University). As one of the first career centers founded in the country, KIMEP University’s career center staff have worked closely with other universities throughout the past two decades in Kazakhstan to assist their staff in opening centers, sharing resources, and advising on best practices.

At KIMEP, the career center’s approach to working with students has changed significantly over the years and has adapted with changes in technology. KIMEP Career Director Meruert Adaibekova recalled, “Our center used to work with paper-based files; we would gather and file paper copies of resumes, and would put up job announcements from companies on poster boards at the university. Nowadays, everything is electronic, and we have a nuanced and individualized approach to advertising job vacancies - we target students based on their status as a master’s or bachelor’s graduate. We also target job announcements based on vacancies for recent graduates, experienced graduations, and internships or part-time jobs.”

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3 Interview with Meruert Adaibekova, Career Center Director, KIMEP University, September 5, 2017
As this paper demonstrates, career and advising centers in Kazakhstan provide a varied number of services to students and alumni, and have different levels of engagement with industry. Many of the challenges that career centers expressed are not faced by Kazakhstani institutions alone; for example, tracking student employment data and maintaining accurate alumni records is a challenge faced by universities globally.

**Survey Among Kazakhstan Career Centers: Questions and Findings**

From August - September 2017, the author conducted a written survey and follow-on interviews with universities across Kazakhstan. The survey included 19 multiple-choice and open-ended questions, and was sent to over 15 targeted universities. The author received eight responses to the survey. Respondents included career center directors or staff from the following universities:

- Kazakh British Technical University, (Almaty)
- Kazakh National Research University named after Satpaev (Almaty)
- KIMEP University (Almaty)
- Narxoz University (Almaty)
- Sulyeman Demirel University (Almaty)
- KazGUU University (Astana)
- Nazarbayev University (Astana)
- Kokshetau State University named after Valikhanov (Kokshetau)

These universities, though limited in number, do represent a mix of national, state, private, and joint-stock institutes of higher education, and three different cities in Kazakhstan. In addition, the career centers at these universities were established as early as 1995 (KIMEP University) to as recently as 2015 (Kokshetau State University and KazGUU University). This section of the paper draws insight from the initial survey responses as well as follow up interviews with select centers, in addition to the author’s own experience supervising the career center at KIMEP University from 2010-14. It also draws from the author’s current work with IREX, which engages robustly with career centers in the U.S. and different parts of the world.

In the United States, career centers tend to fall under the supervision of either academic affairs or student affairs. In Kazakhstan, a similar pattern emerges. Among those career centers interviewed, we can see the following breakdown of where career centers are placed structurally at universities, with most of them being under a Vice Rector’s Office:

- Office of the Registrar
- Vice Rector’s Office, including the following:
The following section of the paper breaks down the survey questions individually, with charts that illustrate data by university. Throughout this section, illustrative examples, follow-on interviews, and best practices supplement these survey question responses. Question categories are grouped into three broad areas:

1. Career Center Services
2. Industry Engagement
3. Career Center Capacity Building and Staff Training

Career Center Services for Students

One of the questions that the survey gauged was “What are the top 3 services that your career center offers to students to help prepare them for employability and job competitiveness?” The following answers emerged:

**TOP THREE SERVICES FOR STUDENTS**

- Training and master classes
- Internships
- Guest lectures from companies
- Alumni job placement support
- Annual career fairs
- Career consultations
- Career assessment
- Company visits
- On-campus recruitment
- Simulated interviews by companies
- Job announcements
- Student portfolios
- Networking with alumni
Training, seminars and master classes related to employability competencies emerged unanimously as the top services that career centers provide to students across the board from career centers polled. These included training sessions and feedback on resumes and CVs, interview preparation, and interviewing skill labs. Nazarbayev University highlighted a best practice of inviting companies on campus to provide ‘mock interviews’ to students. Though the interviews are not always for currently open positions, Nazarbayev University Career and Advising Center Director Yevgeniya Kim noted that ‘often companies are so impressed with our students during the mock interviews that they find ways to offer them internships or keep them in mind for future opportunities’.

Another service highlighted among 50% of universities polled was guest lectures and training sessions from companies for students. Some universities invite companies to deliver specialized seminars for upper class students, and others invite companies to offer short ‘master classes’ on topics such as personal branding, goal setting, and interview preparation. KIMEP University stressed the importance of starting these workshops from students’ first year of studies and integrating them into the entire student lifecycle. Among other services offered, career consultations and assessments, organizing and monitoring internships, job fairs, and work with companies (excursions to companies, on-campus recruitment, and company professional days on campus) were mentioned as well.

One U.S. based ‘best practice’ to highlight for this category is a simple practice to complement trainings and master classes: at many U.S. universities, the career services center offers one-page handouts to students on a variety of career-related topics. For example, Georgetown University’s Walsh School of Foreign Service Graduate Career Center provides a whole range of handouts available to students, including the following 1-2 pagers: informational interview tips, informational interview questions, telephone interview tips, interviewing skills, behavioral interviewing, case based interviewing, CV guides, cover letter guides, networking guides, one page resumes, and networking development plans.

4 Interview with Yevgeniya Kim, Career and Advising Center Director, Nazarbayev University. August 28, 2017
Career Services for Companies

After polling career centers on top services for students, the survey next addressed what services career centers offer to companies.

“What are the top three services that your career center offers to companies?”

The most common services that universities provide to companies include recruitment assistance - helping to locate specialists among the university’s current upper-class students, recent graduates and alumni - and providing a pipeline of students for internship placements. Both answers point to a strong direct link between universities and industry, with career centers as a focal point. Assisting companies to fill internship positions provides companies with a roster of students with whom they can potentially cultivate and develop into future employees. Internships allow both the students and companies to assess if the work culture is a good fit, as well as provide students with an opportunity to engage in a working environment and learn about what competencies are expected on the job upon graduation.

To assist with employment, several career centers considered their career fairs as a valuable service to companies as well, in addition to the opportunity for companies to provide guest lectures and master classes on campus. In Almaty, for example, the Big 4 accounting firms visit campuses to provide company overviews, often including panelists who are alumni of the university. These events serve as an excellent chance for students to learn more about the companies, ask questions in a safe environment, and even follow up with specialized tests for internships and entry-level positions.
KIMEP University in Almaty offers companies the chance to advertise case study competitions. Student teams have the opportunity to solve a real live case for a company via a team competition. Open to students at both the bachelor and master’s level, these competitions are win-win for students and companies: students have the chance to apply their critical thinking, teamwork, and technical skills to a case study, and companies receive valuable insight that can be applied to marketing, sales and design concepts.

**Annual Career Fairs**

Career fairs represent an important way for universities to stay engaged with industry and to prepare students for employability. Career fairs provide companies access to talent for internships and entry level positions, and provide universities opportunities to engage with a range of local and multinational campus to host on campus. Among those universities surveyed, seven out of eight conduct fairs anywhere from one to three times per year.

Several universities have included innovations over the past several years beyond a traditional career fair format of companies with individual tables interacting with students. For example, KIMEP University has expanded the format of its career fair in recent years, including various sessions that take place alongside the more traditional career stands. For example, during its last career fair, KIMEP included a forum themed ‘Education and Employment: New Realities,” bringing together top HR executives representing diverse backgrounds and perspectives to discuss topics including key skills in the post-industrial era, developing personnel in an innovative economy, employer branding, and other topics of interests to students and companies alike. Students also had the opportunity during the fair to gain real-time feedback on their resumes and learn how to present themselves effectively to potential employers.5

Nazarbayev University noted that the traditional career fair format has not been particularly effective, and instead of organizing annual career fairs, they now conduct a series of on-campus recruitment events throughout the year. “We realized when conducting an annual career fair in April that companies come and don’t always have vacancies available for students graduating in May. The number of vacancies they can offer is limited as well, and not always appropriate for fresh graduates,” noted Yevgeniya Kim. “Instead, we decided to conduct a series of customized campus recruitment events throughout the year, which are designed to help increase the employability levels of Nazarbayev University graduates.”

The following survey question captured data regarding employment offers that university students receive as a result of attending job fairs.

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5 For more information, see “KIMEP University Job Fair” https://www.kimep.kz/current/job-fair/

6 Interview with Yevgeniya Kim, Career and Advising Center Director, Nazarbayev University, August 28, 2017
Data on student employment varied greatly, with most universities reporting that they do not have data to report. One university noted that despite trying to capture this data, it is very difficult to successfully obtain it from the companies attending their career fairs. While three of the universities were able to provide data, their number varied dramatically - from 30%, to 45%, to 76%. While the 76% appears very high, this can be explained due to the university’s targeted approach to career fairs. KazGUU sponsors two career fairs per year - one in November, for students looking for internships in the spring or summer of the following year, and a second in April targeting 4th year students. During the spring career fair, 35 companies participated last year, and the focus was on recruiting 4th year students across a range of majors, including Economics, Accounting and Audit, Finance, Tourism, Management, HR Psychology, and translation studies\(^7\).

The wide range of answers on means of conducting career fairs, varied formats, and difficulty in statistics are not uncommon to other parts of the world as well. Gathering data from companies can be very difficult across the globe. KazGUU’s idea of holding bi-annual fairs to highlight internship opportunities in the fall and employment opportunities in the spring is one best practice that other universities may want to consider adapting, if appropriate to their circumstances.

\(^7\) Interview with Kristina Matsalak, Director of Corporate Development and Career Center, Higher School of Economics, KazGUU University, 9/13/2017
Industry Engagement and Feedback

Industry Advisory Boards

Universities around the world utilize advisory boards for a multitude of purposes. Some of these boards are act as a platform to advise the university leadership, including chancellors, presidents, provosts and deans. Such strategic advisory boards may include influential community leaders, government, businesspeople and alumni. Other boards can be college-or program specific, involving university alumni and stakeholders relevant to the college programs; for example, journalism and mass media, engineering, or business. A third type of board is an industry advisory board. Career centers can have an important role to play in helping to drive the foundation, mission, and agenda of industry advisory boards. Given career centers’ close links to industry, often the career center staff are the individuals who may be in a best position to develop a working relationship with those individuals involved in carrying out the board’s agenda.

Industry advisory boards have the potential to serve as a vital link between the business community and the university, providing policy recommendations related to workforce preparedness. University industry advisory board objectives include:

- Integrating university curriculum with real-world needs and innovations
- Developing a pipeline for student internships and careers
- Fundraising and other development support to the university

Advisory boards usually meet at least once or twice per academic year, and oftentimes appoint working group committees to carry out specific recommendations related to changes or innovations in curriculum content, course instruction, and university development.

This survey did include a question on advisory boards with the goal of assessing the current state of advisory boards at Kazakhstani universities, and what industries are involved. Due to the limited number of respondents, a clear picture does not fully emerge, though the majority of universities do have advisory boards. This does seem to be one area that career centers, particularly those that are well staffed and developed, could continue to develop in partnership with university leadership.
Does your university have an industry advisory board? What industries are represented?

INDUSTRY ADVISORY BOARD

- No Advisory Board: 3 universities
- Has Advisory Board: 5 universities

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<th>Industry</th>
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<td>Finance and Banking</td>
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Five of the universities surveyed have advisory boards, with representatives of finance and banking, manufacturing, mining, and state-owned companies. While Narxoz University in Almaty does not have a board, it does engage with business in interesting ways: instead of an advisory board, the university organizes thematic round table discussions with employers. Each time, the targeted invite group changes based on the topics at hand - for example, the university has organized round tables for employers in the areas of banking, consulting, audit, hospitality, agricultural and manufacturing industries. This practice could be valuable for those universities that are looking for targeted feedback from particular industries, and compliment advisory board activities.

The next two questions gauged industry feedback on student skills: top skills necessary for the workforce, and top skills that companies consider lacking among university graduates. While this survey assessed from the perspective of feedback that career center directors receive from companies, a follow-on study with companies directly would be an interesting and valuable exercise. More information on such a labor market assessment conducted with companies is included under the ‘further recommendations’ section of this paper.
What feedback do you receive from companies/industry on top skills necessary for students entering the workforce?

Among those universities that responded to question, both hard skills and soft skills emerged as necessary - hard skills including IT/software skills, excel, and English language, and soft skills including a number related critical thinking, teamwork, and other attributes necessary to succeed in the workplace. Interestingly, problem solving was not mentioned, though creativity and adaptability are both important aspects of that skill.

The follow up question to top skills necessary for students entering the workforce was the following –

Are there any skills that companies consider lacking among university graduates? If yes, can you provide an example?
While universities noted that employers stressed the importance of and soft skills to succeed in the workplace in the previous question, they also received feedback that these very skills are lacking to a degree among recent graduates. Analytical thinking, initiative, and attention to detail were also mentioned, in addition to students’ ability to take theories and apply them in practice. Students might know a formula, but don’t have the ability to apply it to the work at hand. One university mentioned that students’ ability to work with large data sets is lacking as well. However, several universities mentioned that they do not receive such feedback from industry. Two universities noted that they do not receive ‘negative’ feedback and that for the most part, their graduates are in demand in the local workforce.

Both survey questions point to a need for universities to address students’ ability to apply theory to practice, in addition to the development of their technical skills for employability. Problem-based learning, and locally-generated case studies stressing a team approach, could be some of the proposed solutions to address these issues. Career center staff are not responsible for introducing these changes into universities’ academic programs, but can advocate for industry partnerships and experiential learning programs that augment and compliment academic offerings.

**Capacity Building and Training for Career Center Staff**

The next section of the study tried to ascertain what career center staff themselves would see as helpful in terms of their own professional development, and the services that they could provide if additional resources were available. The goal of this section of the paper was to capture the real needs of career center staff and the ideas that they have for expanded services that they could provide in the future.

**What training would you find beneficial for career center staff, to work more effectively with students and companies?**

![Bar chart showing training desired for career center staff](chart.png)
The majority of career center staff expressed that they would like additional training on topics including alumni engagement, social media and networking. After these topics, fundraising, and refreshers on interviewing and presentation skills were next, followed by grant writing, resume writing, and data visualization. Yevgeniya Kim, Career and Advising Center Director at Nazarbayev University, noted that career center staff gather large amounts of data, but then don’t necessarily have the skill or capacity to analyze and present it. For example, staff lack the ability to work with CRM software, excel, and data visualization to make convincing professional presentations. This is an important observation and recommendation for university administrators in terms of career center staff professional development. Alumni engagement is another area that nearly every center noted, and is a key to engagement with local employers. In many cases, university alumni hold key positions with local companies. These alumni can serve a career center or university advancement office in a myriad of ways – from arranging internships, to organizing company visits, to serving as guest speakers on campus and even helping with fundraising efforts.

The next survey question also provided key insight into what career centers would like to provide if given more resources.

If your university had additional funding, what other activities would you like to do, or services you would like to provide, through your career center?

- Career center staff training: 7
- Launch industry advisory board: 6
- Attend conferences and seminars: 6
- Collect more data: 4
- Additional training for students: 3
- Introduce new practices at annual career fair: 2

The most obvious need that emerged from the survey was further training for career center staff. Commentary included the following: a large problem for career centers is hiring and retaining qualified staff. As Yevgeniya Kim commented, “It’s strategically important to define the necessary competencies for staff to hire and keep qualified employees.” Some of the universities mentioned that they would like to launch an advisory board, and collect additional data. Other items on university ‘wish lists’ reinforced the notion of further training and professional development opportunities for both career center staff as well as students. For staff, that would involve training on and collection of more data, and for students, enhanced training areas and activities related to career fairs.
In terms of career centers’ involvement in professional associations, answers were quite varied as well. Four universities reported that their career centers are not involved in professional associations, while four are. For example, one career center is involved in the Almaty Business Association. One noted that several Almaty universities and Kokshetau State University were involved in an ‘Association of Career Centers,’ which gathered three times to discuss issues of topical importance to career centers. While this association hasn’t been active for the past several years, Meruert Adaibekova from KIMEP believes it would be useful to resurrect. “A joint association of career centers in Kazakhstan would be very beneficial to career center directors. We could utilize this forum to organize trainings for career center staff, involving experts in fields such as counseling and soft skills training. It would also be a wonderful way to liaise with the Ministry of Education on issues of common concern to university career centers throughout the country,” noted Adaibekova. To further gauge training needs, the survey included the following question:

Is your career center a part of any professional associations? If yes, what are they?

Yevgeniya Kim, Career and Advising Center Director at Nazarbayev University, noted that she is the Kazakhstan country director for the Asia Pacific Career Association, and that part of her mission with the association will be to connect career centers in Kazakhstan and disseminate information about the association. Nazarbayev University also shares its resources with other universities in Kazakhstan through the framework of the Eurasia Higher Education Leaders’ Forum. For example, at this year’s annual forum, the Career and Advising Center sponsored a half-day session featuring different speakers and discussion forums on “Enhancing graduate employability through employer relations.”

8 Interview with Meruert Adaibekova, Career Center Director, KIMEP University, September 5, 2017
9 For more information see: Eurasian Higher Education Leaders’ Forum:
http://ehelf.nu.edu.kz/ehelf/SharingNUExperience__/CAC#.Wb1x44xSyM9
In addition to professional association involvement, career center staff use a variety of resources to stay current with best practice.

What resources do you follow to stay current with best practices for career centers?

Given more resources what services would you provide?

Universities have a range of strategies in this area, from participation in local and international conferences and trainings, to accessing information online, and taking courses via Coursera or other platforms. Narxoz University highlighted an innovative practice of utilizing SMS messaging to distribute job vacancy announcements to students, as well as more traditional ways of sending students messages via their university email. One university noted that it conducts regular meetings with recruitment agencies, and invites them to conduct meetings on campus.

Survey Results: Limitations and Areas for Further Inquiry

One limitation, as noted in several areas of this paper, is that the author only received eight survey responses. A future area of activity, resources permitted, would be to expand the study to include other universities in Kazakhstan and potentially Central Asia. Other priorities could emerge from universities that do not have career services as advanced as those who responded to this survey. A follow-on study would also consider the perspective of university students and alumni. It would be very helpful to gauge how career center services did or did not assist students and alumni in identifying internships and employment, and preparing them for those opportunities. It would also be useful to gain more insight from students on which career center activities, and at what point in their academic careers, most influenced their internship and employment decisions.
Workforce Development in Kazakhstan: How are Non-University Players Involved?

Non-university actors have been involved in career center development via a number of initiatives over the past several years, including the UNIWORK Program, which involved a network of universities throughout Central Asia. The UNIWORK Program, co-funded by the Tempus Programme of the European Union, worked with a network of 12 universities throughout Central Asia and three from the EU from 2013-16. Titled “Strengthening Career Centres in Central Asia Higher Education Institutions to empower graduates in obtaining and creating quality employment,” the program worked to transform the career centers in their HEIs into “truly efficient instruments to develop students’ and graduates’ employability and to promote and support employment and entrepreneurship amongst them.” Project activities included capacity building for career center staff, strengthening organizational capacities of centers and services for students, and creating a knowledge base on employment and entrepreneurship. Resources on the UNIWORK website available for public access include “Student Employability and Entrepreneurship in Central Asia,” and “Career Centers in Central Asian HEIs: Current Status and Good Practices,” in additions to the proceedings of an international conference held in Bishkek in 2016, “University Career Centres: Bridging the gap between universities and the labor market to improve graduates’ employability – International Conference Proceedings.”

In Kazakhstan, the UNIWORK Program primary partners included Kokshetau State University and the New Economic University (Narxoz), as well as the Ministry of Education and Science and the Association of Trade and Industry Companies. Both universities in the program have taken part in the survey for this paper.

While the UNIWORK Program was unique and large in scale for Central Asia, the results of the project cannot necessarily represent a country-wide study in relation to career centers and workforce preparedness in Kazakhstan, given the small sample of Kazakhstani higher education institutes involved. However, the UNIWORK website products can function as an excellent resource for career center staff interested in reviewing best practices and accessing conference materials.

British Councils Kazakhstan worked with a number of universities around Kazakhstan from 2014-2016 as part of the ‘SEE into the future: skills, entrepreneurship and employability in the 21st center’ initiative. The initiative was widespread, with projects throughout Southern and Eastern Europe, as well as Central Asia, and brought together representatives of government, business, and universities to discuss a range of topics on skills, entrepreneurship and employment. Support to university career and advising centers was one component of the project. In Kazakhstan, for example, the SEE Program collaborated with universities from throughout the country to organize a series of trainings and consultations for career center staff in collaboration with the Association of Graduate Career Advisory Services and the head of the Career and Advising Center at Warwick University, Ms. Sue Bennet. Ms. Bennet participated in the Eurasian Higher Education Leaders Forum at Nazarbayev University in 2015, and also conducted a workshop titled ‘Organizing the Career Centers’ under the framework of the university’s Job and Internship Fair the same year.

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10 For more information, see About UNIWORK” http://www.uniwork-project.eu/content/about-uniwork
In terms of SEE Program impact, former British Councils Project Manager Albina Tortbayeva noted: “I believe the SEE training series was very helpful for career and advising center staff, as there was no alternative professional development training in the country at the time. One participant even became a member of the Association of Graduate Career Advisory Services and visited its Sheffield office under the UNIWORK project. Many of the center staff even created online webinars for students with tips on CV writing and how to prepare for a job interview.”

Ms. Tortbayeva provided important insight on some of the challenges that career and advising center staff face in Kazakhstan that she observed firsthand during her period of engagement on the SEE Program. These included:

▶ An absence of an officially approved standard of career centers’ scope of work, including standardized policies, curriculum and types of services;
▶ Large volumes of work without enough staff to support the workload
▶ Lack of career guidance and counseling education among center staff
▶ Lack of a streamlined approach to submitting data to the Ministry of Education and Science
▶ Lack of in-country professional development opportunities

Several of these areas correspond to survey responses by career center directors, and point to needs related to workforce development that will be addressed further in the recommendations summary of this paper.

Synergies existed between the UNIWORK Program and British Councils’ SEE Program. For example, as noted above, both projects involved training with some of the same targeted universities and career centers’ staff. However, the UNIWORK Program is complete, and British Councils staff no longer work on the SEE Program initiatives with career centers in Kazakhstan. As such, follow on work would be necessary to gauge the long-term impact of these programs on career center staff, career center operations, and data on student outcomes as related to employability and workforce preparedness.

The Astana International Financial Center’s Bureau for Continuing Professional Development (BCPD) is a new initiative that seeks to collaborate with Kazakhstani institutes of higher education to implement minors based on international certifications, including ACCA, CFA, and SHRM. An additional goal is to provide more than 1,000 professionals in Kazakhstan with trainings, based on international certifications such as CFA, ACCA, and CIMA. Currently, the Bureau has plans to implement several programs and minors with (Suleyman Demirel University and the International IT University in Almaty; and KazGUU in Astana. In addition, the AIFC’s Bureau has signed a strategic agreement with Coursera, and can utilize their online platform and courses as a part of minors/programs. While the AIFC initiatives are new, university career center staff would be well suited to collaborate with and potentially publicize the AIFC’s practical training opportunities.

11 Interview with Albina Tortbayeva, former Program Manager, British Councils Kazakhstan, September 8, 2017
12 Correspondence with Arman Shokparov, AIFC, August and September 2017
Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper explored the role that university career centers have, and can potentially have, in improving students’ workforce preparedness at universities in Kazakhstan. The paper reviews survey responses and interviews from a range of players in Kazakhstan, and draws from best practices worldwide in its analysis. Career centers are, of course, one player in the workforce development process. With staffs of just 2-3 people, career centers at Kazakhstani institutes of higher education constantly juggle many priorities, deadlines, and requests from a multitude of players, in addition to resource and budget constraints.

This paper’s recommendations for developing and adapting career services to improve students’ workforce preparedness include bullet points in each of the three primary areas of (1) career center services, (2) industry engagement, and (3) career center capacity building and staff training. These recommendations may be useful for university leadership, career center staff, and local and international organizations interested in developing the capacity of university career center staff and their services as a vehicle to improve workforce preparedness and economic development in the Republic of Kazakhstan. These recommendations may be applicable for the development community and higher education administrators working in other geographic parts of the world as well.
## Key Recommendations for University Leaders, Donors and External Constituents

### CAREER CENTER SERVICES

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<th>Specialized Career Fairs and Company Engagement</th>
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<td>A nuanced career fair approach and varied format may yield positive results related to workforce preparedness. Universities may consider, as noted in this paper, strategies such as KazGUU’s approach to host a fall semester fair targeting internships for students, or folding in multiple forums and strategy sessions for students during a Career Fair, as noted by KIMEP University’s approach.</td>
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<th>Employability Preparation</th>
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<td>Universities may consider, as an alternate to career fairs, a suite of employer engagement activities throughout the year, as demonstrated by Nazarbayev University. These activities include visits to companies for students at all grade levels, mock interviews on campus, and employer presentations by sector throughout the year.</td>
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<th>One-Pager Career Skills Tips for Students</th>
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<td>Career Centers can develop a suite of one-pagers for student reference to assist students in their internship and employment preparedness. These can be accessible to students in a central space (for example, right inside of or near the Career Center space) and available during both in-person and after hours.</td>
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### INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT

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<th>Labor Market Assessment</th>
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<tr>
<td>Universities may consider conducting a labor market assessment to collect up to date information on sectoral employment needs, recruitment priorities, skills gaps, and qualifications sought by employers. The assessment could be conducted by career center staff, and potentially serve as a professional development opportunity for upper class or graduate students. Such a survey would be useful to inform the university leadership, academic programs, and career center activities, in addition to advisory boards and ministry liaisons.</td>
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This paper presents the above recommendations as a range of ideas and resources for universities to consider, and as concrete programming activities that international donors could consider supporting to enhance students’ career preparedness. Ultimately, investing in university career centers fosters greater opportunities for youth, builds linkages between universities and their communities, and helps spur innovation and economic growth.

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14 For more information, see The Academies’ Career Coach Academy, http://www.theacademies.com/about/career-coach-academy/

15 This recommendation was supported by several Career Center Directors via the survey and follow-on interviews
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Nazarbayev University Eurasian Higher Education Leaders’ Forum: http://ehelf.nu.edu.kz/ehelf/SharingNUExperience__/CAC#.Wb1x44xSyM9


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INTERVIEWS AND CORRESPONDENCE

Meruert Adaibekova, Career Center Director, KIMEP University, September 5, 2017

Yevgeniya Kim, Career and Advising Center Director, Nazarbayev University, August 28, 2017

Kristina Matsalak, Director of Corporate Development and Career Center, Higher School of Economics, KazGUU University, September 13, 2017

Arman Shokparov, Astana International Financial Center, August and September 2017

Albina Tortbayeva, Former Program Manager, British Councils Kazakhstan, September 3, 2017
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- Sulyeman Demirel University (Almaty)
- KazGUU University (Astana)
- Nazarbayev University (Astana)
- Kokshetau State University named after Valikhanov (Kokshetau)

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