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Report on the Implementation of Activities in the Higher Education Sector of the Kyrgyz Republic (2023–2025)

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Table of content

Introduction	3
Implementation of Reforms in the Higher Education Sector	3
Digitalization and Innovation	5
Funding and International Partnerships.....	6
Key Changes and Directions of Medical Education Reform in the Kyrgyz Republic	7
Public Reaction and Assessment of the Reforms	8
Conclusions	10
Sources	11



Introduction

The Ministry of Science, Higher Education and Innovation of the Kyrgyz Republic was established as a result of the reform of the education management system. A decree issued by President Sadyr Japarov provided for the division of the former Ministry of Education and Science into two separate bodies — the Ministry of Education (responsible for schools and vocational colleges) and the newly established Ministry of Science, Higher Education and Innovation (source: 24.kgrus.azattyk.org).

The new ministry focuses on the development of scientific, technological, and innovative activities, higher education, and the protection of intellectual property (source: 24.kgrus.azattyk.org). The following section presents an analysis of the ministry's activities from 2023 to 2025 across key areas: progress of higher education reforms, digitalization and innovation, funding and international partnerships, and public response.

Implementation of Reforms in the Higher Education Sector

A draft Strategy for the Development of Higher Education in the Kyrgyz Republic until 2030 has been developed. At present, its provisions and key directions are being discussed among the ministry, universities, and the expert community. During one of the meetings, Deputy Minister Nurlan Omurov delivered a report on the *Strategy for the Development of Higher Education in the Kyrgyz Republic for the period 2025–2030*, indicating that senior education officials are actively involved in the drafting process.

In the media and academic sources, the Strategy is presented as an important policy document aimed at promoting the integration of Kyrgyz universities into the global educational space, attracting international students, and improving the quality of training for specialists ([OmUY](#)).

Optimization and Consolidation of Universities In 2023, the Ministry of Education launched a series of systemic reforms aimed at improving the quality of university education. One of the key directions of these reforms is the consolidation of higher education institutions and the reduction of weak universities.

As early as 2022, a presidential decree initiated the reorganization of several state universities, and in 2023–2024, the ministry proposed the merger of three regional universities — Naryn State University, Talas State University, and Batken State University — with the country's largest institution, Kyrgyz National University (KNU) ([24.kg](#)). The main objective of this merger is to consolidate the financial, human, and scientific potential of the universities and enhance their competitiveness ([24.kg](#)). As a result, Kyrgyz National University will become the legal successor of the merged institutions, which is expected to strengthen the material base and improve the quality of education in the regions ([24.kg](#)). At the same time, there is a noted trend toward reducing the excessive number of universities and students. Experts have pointed out that having 81 universities for a small country like Kyrgyzstan is too many, and that the number of higher education institutions should be gradually decreased ([24.kg](#)).

Combating “Fake Students” and Corruption. The Ministry, in cooperation with law enforcement agencies, launched a campaign to eliminate the practice of fictitious enrollment, whereby students are officially registered at universities but do not attend classes, effectively “*purchasing*” their diplomas.



At the end of 2023, inspections were carried out, and by early 2024, more than 13,000 students who did not attend classes were expelled in the Osh region alone ([24.kg](#)). The scale of the problem proved to be significant: for instance, 3,573 students were expelled from Osh State University, 2,754 from Osh Technological University, 3,167 from the Kyrgyz-Uzbek University, 3,629 from Osh State Pedagogical University, and 172 from the Osh branch of Kyrgyz National University ([24.kg](#)). These figures confirm that, in some cases, higher education had turned into a “scheme” in which students could pay for grades and credits without attending classes ([kaktus.media](#)). The leadership of the State Committee for National Security (SCNS) publicly announced that it would inspect every university and hold accountable the officials involved in unlawful student admissions ([24.kg](#), [kaktus.media](#)). The strict measures, including mass expulsions, received broad public support as a necessary step toward restoring integrity and improving the quality of the education system.

Changes in Admission Policies and Training Structure. The Ministry has initiated a review of the structure of personnel training in higher education. In particular, discussions have focused on limiting admissions to oversaturated fields such as law and economics ([bilim.akipress.org](#)). Each year, thousands of graduates receive degrees in these fields, yet the labor market cannot absorb them all. In the spring of 2025, following the Ministry’s first year of active reforms, Acting Minister Baktiyar Orozov announced plans to reduce admissions in these areas in order to balance the structure of professional training ([bilim.akipress.org](#)). Furthermore, in March 2024, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the transition to a 12-year general education system, which will have long-term implications for higher education as well ([kaktus.media](#)). However, this transition has sparked debate: many experts, including the head of the State Committee for National Security (SCNS), argued that it would be better to first improve the quality of existing education before extending the duration of study ([kaktus.media](#)).

Evaluation of University Performance. An important innovation has been the introduction of key performance indicators (KPIs) for universities. In 2025, the Ministry developed a draft set of KPIs that take into account the specific context of each institution ([24.kg](#)). According to Deputy Minister Nurlan Omurov, this will make it possible to objectively assess the performance of universities and link funding to their effectiveness ([24.kg](#)). Work is also underway to promote competition and improve quality through external and internal systems of accreditation and quality assurance ([24.kg](#)). This measure is expected to encourage universities to enhance both teaching and research activities.

Abolition of the Correspondence (Part-Time) Study Format. Another significant reform is the gradual abolition of the traditional correspondence (part-time) form of study in higher education institutions. At the end of 2023 and the beginning of 2024, the national leadership concluded that the classical correspondence education model was ineffective, as it was often associated with formal attendance and low educational quality. The government decided to replace it with modern distance learning technologies. A corresponding Cabinet of Ministers resolution prohibited admission to correspondence programs in several fields starting from the 2026/2027 academic year ([kaktus.media](#)). In August 2025, the President signed a decree stipulating that, beginning in the 2026/2027 academic year, admission to correspondence programs based on secondary education would be terminated, regardless of a university’s ownership status ([kaktus.media](#)).

Universities are required to transition to a “digital distance learning format”, which involves the use of electronic platforms, interactive resources, and attendance monitoring systems



designed to improve quality and reduce corruption risks ([kaktus.media](#)). The only permitted exception will be an accelerated distance format for students who already hold a professional or higher education degree (e.g., for second higher education or master's programs), and even then only with the mandatory use of modern digital technologies ([kaktus.media](#)). At the same time, the government has instructed relevant bodies to develop the necessary infrastructure — from online learning platforms to remote student identification systems — to ensure that the new format is transparent and effective ([kaktus.media](#)). This reform effectively eliminates the outdated correspondence study model, transforming it into a modern digital learning format.

Digitalization and Innovation

Electronic Systems in Education. The Ministry places high priority on the digitalization of higher education. Electronic systems are being implemented at all stages — from the admissions process to the educational process. For example, applicants use the automated system “Abiturient Online”, through which student admissions were conducted in 2023 ([24.kg](#)). This has increased transparency and convenience during the admissions process. Additionally, electronic gradebooks, online schedules, and other elements of the “electronic university” have been actively developed. The COVID-19 pandemic previously accelerated the transition to distance learning, and in 2023, universities continued to use blended learning formats. In September 2025, the Ministry even conducted an experiment: for the first two weeks of the academic year, all universities (except medical institutions) held online classes to optimize the start-of-semester process ([24.kg](#)). This initiative revealed both the opportunities and challenges of digital learning: students noted the convenience of the online format for upper-year courses, while first-year students reported difficulties in familiarizing themselves with peers and absorbing material through a screen ([24.kg](#)). Such experiences are being taken into account in the further planning of digital innovations.

Transition from Correspondence (Part-Time) to Distance Learning. A key step in digitalization is the aforementioned transformation of correspondence (part-time) education. Instead of the occasional in-person sessions under the old model, students will now benefit from a fully developed digital infrastructure. Under the reform, universities are required to implement electronic platforms for interaction with part-time students, conduct online lectures and seminars, and use proctoring and remote identity verification systems during exams ([kaktus.media](#)). The goal is **to reduce formalistic approaches to education** and eliminate situations in which a student is enrolled “only on paper”. As emphasized in the presidential decree, the digital format is intended to improve educational quality, reduce corruption risks, and ensure that part-time students genuinely acquire knowledge ([kaktus.media](#)).

The government has committed to developing modern distance learning technologies — increasing internet bandwidth for educational purposes, implementing electronic document management systems and digital libraries, and training faculty to work with learning management systems (LMS), among other measures. Thus, digitalization is becoming an integral part of the new model of higher education.

Academic Innovation Fund (AIF). As part of its innovation development strategy, the Ministry launched the Academic Innovation Fund (AIF) in 2023 — a grant program supporting university research. This initiative is part of the larger project “Quality and Innovation in Higher Education (QIHE)”, funded jointly with the International Development Association (World Bank) ([24.kg](#)). The AIF provides competitive grants to university faculty and researchers for the implementation of research and innovation projects. The maximum grant



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amount is up to \$200,000, and the project duration can be up to 36 months ([24.kg](#)). Priority is given to inter-university research in key economic sectors, as well as projects led by women scientists and those involving young researchers from vulnerable social groups ([24.kg](#)). The first round of the AIF competition was announced in the 2023/24 academic year, with applications accepted until August 2025 ([24.kg](#)).

Establishment of Innovation Centers and Laboratories. In parallel with grant support, the infrastructure for university research has begun to take shape. Innovation and Research Centers are being established at five leading universities in Kyrgyzstan — Kyrgyz National University (KNU), Kyrgyz State Technical University (KSTU), Kyrgyz State Medical Academy, Kyrgyz National Agrarian University, and Osh State University ([24.kg](#)). These centers are equipped with modern laboratories and equipment, designed to unite research teams and serve as platforms for collaboration between universities and the industrial sector. The QIHE project has set the goal of implementing an advanced research model that involves business and industry in the scientific and educational process and promotes the commercialization of research outcomes ([24.kg](#)). It is expected that scientific ideas will be transformed into real products and startups, driving economic growth ([24.kg](#)). Thus, the Ministry aims to link science with innovation and the market.

Digital Skills and STEM Education. In cooperation with international partners, emphasis is being placed on the development of digital skills and STEM education (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). For example, with support from the European Union, the national program “Altyn Kazyk” is being implemented to improve the quality of secondary education, including a component aimed at promoting STEM subjects, digital literacy, and media literacy among school students ([24.kg](#)). This initiative also benefits higher education by preparing a greater number of applicants ready for engineering, technical, and IT specialties. Universities themselves are expanding IT infrastructure: online services for students are being introduced (for instance, the Kyrgyz-Uzbek University launched a portal for distance learning), and electronic libraries are being developed. Digitalization of administration is also evident: since 2023, many university rectorates have transferred document management to electronic format, and surveillance cameras have been installed in classrooms to ensure exam transparency ([kaktus.media](#)). All of these efforts are part of the broader “Digital Kyrgyzstan 2019–2023” state initiative, which higher education institutions are actively implementing.

Funding and International Partnerships

Support from the World Bank. The main financial resource for the ongoing reforms is the project “Quality and Innovation in Higher Education”, funded through a loan from the International Development Association (IDA), a branch of the World Bank. The World Bank’s Board of Directors approved a project budget of USD 25 million ([24.kg](#)). In 2024, the loan agreement was ratified by the Kyrgyz Parliament, and in 2025, the project entered its active phase ([24.kg](#)). The financing terms are highly favorable: the loan is provided for 50 years, with the first 10 years as a grace period without repayments, and a zero percent interest rate ([24.kg](#)). These funds are allocated to the initiatives described above — including the establishment of innovation centers, AIF grants, faculty development, and improvement of university accreditation systems ([24.kg](#)). In effect, international donors are helping to modernize Kyrgyz higher education, investing in its scientific potential and infrastructure.

Other Donor Programs. In addition to the World Bank, other international partners are active in the higher education sector. The European Union, through the Erasmus+ program, supports



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academic mobility and joint university projects; in 2023, dozens of Kyrgyz faculty members and students participated in various Erasmus projects. The EU has also provided grants for educational development, such as a €6.5 million tranche in 2025, primarily for school education but also supporting STEM and digital literacy ([24.kg](#)).

The Russian Federation remains a key partner: the Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University operates, as well as branches of Russian universities, and Russia annually provides quotas for Kyrgyz students. In 2023, under an intergovernmental agreement, 700 places were allocated in Russian universities for Kyrgyz students ([24.kg](#)), along with 30 targeted quotas for creative specialties ([24.kg](#)), expanding opportunities for Kyrgyz youth to study abroad. Partnerships with neighboring countries are also developing: for example, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan collaborate with Kyrgyzstan on student and faculty exchanges and hold joint scientific conferences. The Chinese “Belt and Road Initiative” includes an educational dimension — scholarships are provided for Kyrgyz students in Chinese universities, and Confucius Institutes are being equipped and supported.

Regional Cooperation and Scientific Diplomacy. In August 2025, the Kyrgyz Republic demonstrated its role within the Organization of Turkic States (OTS): Minister Baktiyar Orozov met with the OTS Secretary-General to discuss cooperation in science, technology, and intellectual property ([turkicstates.org](#)). The Kyrgyz side proposed an agreement on joint legal protection of intellectual property among Turkic-speaking countries and the creation of an Interstate Council for the Protection of Intellectual Rights ([turkicstates.org](#)), highlighting Kyrgyzstan’s leadership in the regional science and innovation agenda. The Ministry of Science also established collaboration with the International Turkic Academy; in 2025, joint research on the history and culture of Turkic peoples was discussed ([kg.akipress.org](#)).

At the bilateral level, active cooperation with Turkey continued: academic exchange programs are being implemented (for example, Turkey annually accepts Kyrgyz students under the Türkiye Bursları scholarship program), and the Kyrgyz-Turkish University “Manas” operates successfully. Kyrgyz universities are signing memoranda of cooperation with foreign partners; in 2023, for instance, Kyrgyz National University signed agreements with several foreign universities, including institutions in Hungary and EU countries ([jagu.edu.kg](#)). Such international integration helps attract grants, conduct joint research, and enhance the quality of education.

Funding for Science. In 2023, budgetary funding for science and university activities underwent significant changes. With the establishment of a separate ministry, a dedicated budget line for science and higher education was created. The Ministry is working to increase state funding for research: according to official data, the share of expenditures on science is expected to reach 0.7% of GDP. Under new projects, universities are provided with funds to upgrade their material and technical base. In addition, private investments are being attracted — for example, through public-private partnerships, scientific and educational centers are being established at universities. International organizations, such as UNESCO and UNDP, also provide expert and technical support for implementing reforms, although the main financial burden rests on the IDA loan.

Key Changes and Directions of Medical Education Reform in the Kyrgyz Republic

State Monopoly on Medical Training



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In August 2025, the President signed a decree establishing a **state monopoly** on medical education. According to the document, the Kyrgyz State Medical Academy (KSMA) is granted the exclusive right to train specialists in higher medical and pharmaceutical education, as well as to conduct retraining and professional development of medical and scientific personnel ([Кактус+2 Радио Азаттык+2](#)).

Medical Education Reform (MER) Project

The Ministry and the Academy are participating in the international project *MER (Medical Education Reform)*, supported by donor partners ([kgma.kg+1](#)).

The third phase of the project ran from September 2021 to August 31, 2024, and included three main components: strengthening professional medical associations, improving the educational process, and developing standards and accreditation systems ([kgma.kg](#)).

In November 2024, the results of the 10-year cooperation within the MER framework were presented, highlighting the revision of curricula, professional development of teaching staff, and enhancement of quality assurance systems in medical education ([eda.admin.ch](#)).

Final reports note that the reforms have improved the training of medical and nursing personnel, raised the quality of education, and strengthened standards in higher education institutions ([eda.admin.ch+1](#)).

The MER initiative demonstrates that the transformations were not only administrative but also substantive - through the enhancement of curricula, development of accreditation systems, and active cooperation with medical associations.

Moratorium on Licensing and Temporary Restrictions

In June 2025, the government announced a **moratorium on the licensing of medical education until 2028** - meaning that new institutions (or programs) will temporarily be unable to obtain licenses to provide medical education ([economist.kg](#)).

This decision may be linked to the proposal to centralize medical education and to prevent further expansion of private medical universities that may not be operating in full compliance with established standards ([economist.kg](#)).

Public Reaction and Assessment of the Reforms

The large-scale reforms in higher education have sparked active public debate, particularly on social media. **Most reactions have been positive**, especially regarding efforts to improve quality and combat corruption. Reports about the mass expulsion of fictitious students attracted widespread attention: many citizens in the comments expressed support for cleaning universities of “ghost students” and emphasized that “a diploma should be earned by those who truly studied.”

A statement by the head of the State Committee for National Security, Kamchybek Tashiev — that “more and more people are receiving diplomas while working abroad... it is more beneficial for the state if 20 students earn their diplomas honestly than 200 formally” — went viral and was widely viewed as fair and justified ([kaktus.media](#)). This position by the security



agency effectively reflected the public's demand for restoring order in the higher education system.

Assessment of the Reforms by the Academic Community. The academic community generally supports the reforms but also voices certain concerns. The transition to a new model of higher education — involving the consolidation of universities, introduction of KPIs, and other measures — is welcomed by younger faculty members, who hope it will bring increased access to grants and greater academic freedom. The launch of the AIF grant fund received a positive response: for the first time, university researchers gained a genuine opportunity to secure funding for their own projects ([24.kg](#)). On social media, faculty members shared information about the AIF competition, noting its transparent procedures and substantial grant amounts (up to USD 200,000) as “unprecedented for our science.” At the same time, experienced professors caution that one-time financial injections are not enough — systematic support for research and higher salaries in universities are essential, otherwise the “brain drain” will continue. Nevertheless, the initial steps, such as the introduction of grant programs and establishment of new laboratories, are viewed positively.

Student Opinions. Students actively discussed the abolition of part-time (correspondence) education and the tightening of academic discipline. Some full-time students welcomed these measures, noting that they increase the value of their diplomas and eliminate competition from part-time students who often combine study with work. However, part-time students themselves and those planning to obtain a second higher education degree remotely expressed concern. On social media, many questioned whether studying would become more difficult for working individuals and residents of remote regions. In its official explanations, the Ministry emphasized that access to higher education would not be restricted — on the contrary, distance learning technologies are expected to expand opportunities, though studies will become more rigorous and transparent. Many users on Facebook and Telegram channels supported this reasoning, agreeing that the traditional part-time education model has outlived its purpose.

Reaction to University Consolidation. The idea of merging regional universities with the central Kyrgyz National University (KNU) received **mixed reactions**. On one hand, students and faculty members of these regional institutions expressed concerns about losing their autonomy, fearing that “our university will dissolve into Bishkek’s KNU.” Local communities, particularly in Naryn and Batken, were worried about potential staff reductions and the outmigration of young people to the capital. On the other hand, many experts welcomed the move, noting that small regional universities have long suffered from chronic underfunding and a shortage of qualified personnel. Online discussions cited the example of neighboring Kazakhstan, where university consolidation has yielded positive results. The Ministry of Science of the Kyrgyz Republic assured the public that regional campuses would be preserved and that students would study under KNU’s unified high standards, gaining access to better faculty and learning materials. Over time, the protests subsided, especially since in 2023 the plan was only at the project stage and was implemented *de jure* in 2025 ([24.kg](#)).

Debate on the 12-Year School System. Although school reform falls outside the direct mandate of this ministry, the public tends to view education as a unified system. The announced transition to a 12-year school model sparked renewed discussions about the quality of education. Many parents and teachers wrote on social media that it would be more reasonable to first improve curricula and textbooks — “to fix the 11-year system before moving to 12 years.” Concerns were raised about the potential overburdening of students and teachers.



These concerns were echoed by K. Tashiev, who stated that a new system should not be introduced “amid declining quality of school education” ([kaktus.media](#)). Supporters of the reform, on the other hand, referred to international experience and the need for integration into the global education system. Ultimately, **public consensus** suggests that any structural changes must be accompanied by genuine improvements in the quality of teaching — a lesson equally applicable to reforms in higher education.

In general, public opinion recognizes the pressing need for the reforms initiated by the Ministry of Science, Higher Education, and Innovation. **Three prevailing tones** can be identified in the public assessments:

- *Support and Hope.* A significant portion of the population—particularly active youth and the intellectual community—supports the course toward innovation, integrity, and transparency. They welcome efforts to combat “purchased” diplomas, appreciate new opportunities such as grants and academic exchanges, and hope that Kyrgyz universities will rise in international rankings.
- *Constructive Criticism.* At the same time, many voices call for focusing not only on structural and performance indicators but also on the substance of education. Experts emphasize the need for faculty development, curriculum renewal, and greater incentives for scientific publications. This group supports the reforms but closely monitors their implementation, warning against formalism in the application of KPIs and other innovations.
- *Concerns and Resistance to Change.* A smaller yet notable segment of society remains skeptical about the new measures. This group includes some long-time education professionals who view the division of ministries and university mergers as risks of increased bureaucracy and the disruption of established traditions. It also includes students who preferred the previous, more “flexible” system—such as part-time diploma programs—and now view the stricter requirements with criticism.

Nevertheless, **the Ministry’s information policy** has been quite active across social media and mass media platforms, providing clarifications, publishing statistics, and sharing examples of progress. For instance, in 2023, stories about restoring order in universities received wide coverage — including reports on the expulsion of thousands of absentee students and efforts to combat bribery (such as the widely reported case of a medical academy lecturer caught accepting a bribe, which became a headline story, [24.kg](#)).

A positive image is also reinforced by news about achievements: Kyrgyz students winning international competitions, the opening of new laboratories, and the growing number of foreign students choosing to study in the Kyrgyz Republic. According to data from the Ministry of Education and Science, in 2023 the majority of international students in Kyrgyz universities came from India and Pakistan ([24.kg](#)), indicating the country’s increasing attractiveness as an educational destination.

Conclusions

During 2023—the first year of the newly established Ministry of Science, Higher Education, and Innovation of the Kyrgyz Republic—a foundation was laid for fundamental transformations in the higher education system. Structural reforms are underway, including the division of ministries and the consolidation of universities; discipline and transparency are



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being strengthened, and digital technologies are being actively implemented. With the support of international partners, funding for innovation and scientific research has been initiated on a scale not previously seen. The public largely perceives these changes positively, while expecting tangible improvements in the quality of education. Significant work remains to fully realize the reforms: corruption must continue to be addressed, faculty qualifications improved, curricula modernized, and university infrastructure upgraded. Early achievements of the Ministry include **restoring order**—ending the practice of selling diplomas and dismissing unscrupulous staff—and **launching innovative projects** such as the AIF and research centers. Next steps include implementing KPIs for universities and completing the planned transformations in the educational process. Overall, 2023–2025 marked a period of active reform initiation, expected to yield a more competitive and modern higher education system in the Kyrgyz Republic in the coming years ([24.kg24.kg](#)).

Sources

- Ministry of Science of the Kyrgyz Republic (media and social media posts),
- news agencies 24.kg ([24.kg24.kg](#)), Kaktus Media ([kaktus.media](#)),
- World Bank data,
- and press releases of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Kyrgyz Republic ([24.kgrus.azattyk.org](#)).