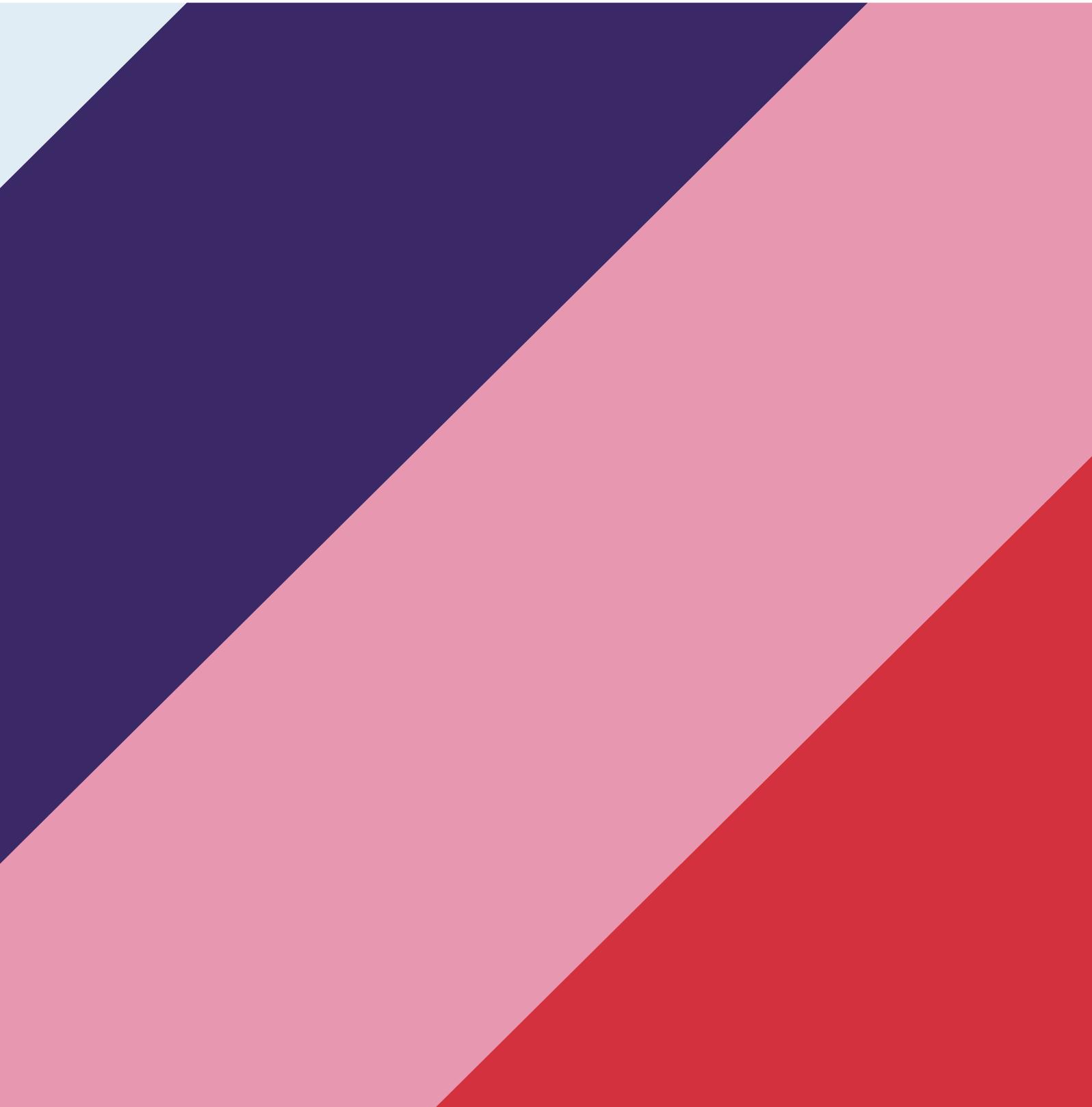


## **Cultural Skills research summary**

Examining cultural skills gaps  
and shortages in Kazakhstan

**Authors:** Sana Kim and Anastasia Goncharova





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## About this report

The purpose of this report is to present an overview of the skills gaps and shortages in the cultural sector in Kazakhstan's two major cities. The research findings are used to draw up recommendations to inform the development of new evidence-based programmes that address the sector's specific needs. The research project was commissioned and funded by the British Council in Kazakhstan and the UK-based Cultural Skills team. This project limits its scope to two cities – Almaty and Astana and seven (cultural) sub-sectors: design, museums and heritage, film, music, performing arts, visual arts, and publishing. The research was carried out over a six-month period using mixed methods: desk-based research, semi-structured interviews with cultural professionals and online surveys with professionals and students. The participants were selected from the wide-ranging database of contacts of the British Council in Kazakhstan and the research team's own extensive network.

This report starts with a general overview of Kazakhstan and its cultural sector. It gives an overview of Kazakhstan's cultural policy and the key players in the cultural and cultural education sectors. It goes on to identify the main skills gaps and shortages across the seven sub-sectors. The primary aim of this report is to provide evidence-based recommendations for the Cultural Skills team and the British Council in Kazakhstan to introduce additional programmes that would help

overcome the challenges uncovered by this research. The report also outlines a list of potential partners, and special considerations that should be considered when devising and implementing such programmes.

It is important to acknowledge that this research project has limitations due to its scope and time constraints. It was also subject to uncertainties that are beyond the control of the authors. It provides insights into skills gaps and shortages in the cultural sector in only two cities in Kazakhstan across as many as seven sub-sectors. It does not therefore provide a comprehensive overview of the cultural and higher education sectors in the whole of Kazakhstan, nor of the two cities.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank British Council colleagues in Kazakhstan and the UK for the continuous support, guidelines and feedback, which were essential for the completion of this report. Likewise, we would like to express our gratitude to colleagues at King's College London who have contributed to this project by providing comments on various drafts. We would also like to thank those who gave up their time to participate in the survey and for interviews and who provided us with valuable insights into the specificities of each city and sub-sector.

## Forewords

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As Kazakhstan increasingly looks to diversify its economy and have less reliance on fluctuating oil prices, the role of other sectors,

including its rich and varied cultural sector, is growing in prominence. Since declaring independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, the cultural sector in Kazakhstan has developed on many fronts. The government has heavily invested in activity including the promotion of the Kazakh language and the development of cultural enterprises and industries, which were not previously state supported. In addition, tourism is becoming increasingly seen as an important sector and culture features heavily in this initiative, not least due to the five UNESCO world heritage sites in the country.

The British Council's Cultural Skills team strengthens cultural relations between the UK and the rest of the world, through sharing knowledge and developing mutual benefit between countries. With the UK and international partners, we build sustainable cultural skills

programmes that develop the abilities of those practitioners and institutions across the whole of the UK and internationally, supporting the artistic, social and economic benefits of a thriving and dynamic cultural sector.

As the cultural sector and creative industries grow from strength to strength, there is huge potential for Kazakhstan to use this sector as a basis to strengthen its international relationships, through the development of its international cultural tourism and by promoting the country's own culture; both traditional and more contemporary, across the globe and at home. This research provides a useful platform from which to build these international relationships; using skills programmes to not only enhance knowledge but also to share experiences and raise awareness of the cultural value of Kazakhstan.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Simon T Dancey', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

**Simon T Dancey**  
Director, Cultural Skills team



The British Council cultural skills research is an important contribution to implementation of the national cultural policy.

It contains findings that will help us identify areas for further development of the cultural landscape in Almaty and Astana. This report also includes useful information on what our cultural practitioners need in terms of professional development and capacity building.

Development of the national cultural potential is one of the key priorities for many countries, including Kazakhstan. It is one of the ways to integrate Kazakhstan into the world cultural space and build an effective international co-operation. In-depth system analysis of the cultural sector,

research activities and the design of effective educational programmes for cultural practitioners play an essential role in this process.

We hope that the British Council will continue cultural skills programmes to explore the contemporary culture of Kazakhstan and to share UK expertise with local cultural professionals. We also thank the British Council for its support for our activities on studying and developing culture, art and science in Kazakhstan.

**Andrey Khazbulatov**

General Director of the Kazakh Research Institute of Culture, Ministry of Culture and Sport of the Republic of Kazakhstan





The issues of the economy of culture are considered today as important components of the successful development of

any modern country. In Kazakhstan, with its high level of potential in the creative industries, the forward-thinking public is also concerned about how culture will evolve further. What competencies should the cultural sector build? How should cultural education change to take account of our current context? The authors of the research initiated by the British Council and the UK-based Cultural Skills team in Kazakhstan's two largest cities, Astana and Almaty, posed these and other questions to themselves and their recipients.

The researchers collected opinions about skills gaps and shortages in Kazakhstan's cultural sector, processed statistical data and produced findings that, in general, supported what those working in the sector already felt they knew. Kazakhstan lacks competent technical specialists and managers. Education has not been adjusted to new challenges so as to support the new market in cultural skills. The majority of our creative workers are isolated from the global artistic community

as they do not speak foreign languages. Our managers don't have an understanding of project management technologies.

In other words, we lack what is considered standard practice or even routine in advanced countries. Therefore, it is high time to follow the advice given by Viktor Misiano, an international curator, 'What you need in the first place is to establish routines. Culture, as well as any human being, lives to routine. We have holidays once a season, but people harvest, seed and work every day. So, creating conditions for our culture to develop routines is the most important task for Almaty, Kazakhstan and Central Asia as a whole.'<sup>1</sup> It is time to engage in routines – to learn foreign languages and global standards of cultural mechanisms, to upgrade education and management, or, in other words, to live in a *global*<sup>2</sup> mode – to capture global experience and make local adjustments to it. The research by the Cultural Skills team may serve as a guide to action and a hint in dealing with everyday tasks.

**Yulia Sorokina**  
Independent curator

1 Искусству Центральной Азии недостает рутины: интервью с В. Мизиано // Капитал. – 12.02.2015. [Central Asian Art Lacks Routine: An Interview with Viktor Misiano in Capital, 12 February 2015]

2 'Glocal' is a term introduced by Achille Bonito Oliva to describe artistic phenomena of both global and local nature.



## Introduction and overview

**After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Kazakhstan became an independent state. At the same time, it started a journey towards democracy and the free market economy. Due to the abundance of natural resources within its vast territory, Kazakhstan has been developing faster than any other former Soviet republic in central Asia. Oil money allowed the government to invest heavily in nation branding, national identity building, and cultural heritage protection initiatives, as well as build a brand new capital city (Astana) 'In the Heart of Eurasia'.<sup>1</sup> Yet, the approach to the country's cultural governance during the first two decades of independence was rather disorganised, or as some experts have described it – ad hoc.<sup>2</sup>**

Only in recent years has the Kazakh government started working extensively on streamlining its cultural policies. In 2014, the Ministry of Culture and Sport (MCS) released a white paper entitled – *The Concept of Cultural Policy in the Republic of Kazakhstan*, which represents an important milestone in the development of cultural policy in modern day Kazakhstan. The concept was intended as an umbrella policy that would enhance the competitiveness of Kazakhstan's cultural environment through the development of 1) the management and financial system in the cultural sphere; 2) the cultural education system; 3) cultural research programmes; 4) the application of information and innovative technologies in the cultural sphere and 5) modern cultural clusters.

However, shortly after the release of the document, Kazakhstan found itself in the midst of financial difficulties. Along with other countries that heavily rely on their natural resources for economic growth, Kazakhstan has been vulnerable to the fall of oil prices

in 2014. Consequently, its economic growth slowed down significantly in the years that followed. On the one hand, within this economic situation, the ambitious plans outlined in the *Concept of Cultural Policy* might be adversely affected by the inevitable budget cuts. On the other hand, culture, with its economic potential, has taken on more importance for Kazakhstan. As the government is attempting to transform the country's growth model away from resource extraction towards a more diversified economy, culture has become a promising resource for the country's future economic growth.

In addition to the advancements in the domain of public policy, over the past five years the independent cultural sector has also experienced a proliferation of bottom up initiatives in the form of new independent art spaces, festivals, fairs and concept stores. While this increased dynamism in the independent sector comes mainly from the former capital city Almaty, Astana is becoming more and more well known for its highbrow classical arts such as opera and ballet.

1 *In the Heart of Eurasia* – the title of a book written by Nursultan Nazarbayev about Astana.

2 Rafis Abazov and Andrey Khazbulatov, 'Kazakhstan to Reform its Cultural Sector,' in *CACI Analyst*, 2015.

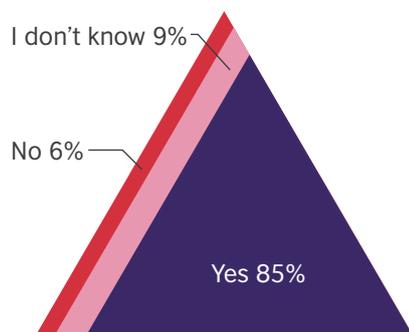
## Key findings

**The interview participants generally agreed that the quality of education in the cultural sector has deteriorated abruptly in Kazakhstan over the past decade. The research project identified five overarching problems regarding Kazakhstan's cultural education that might be behind its reported decrease in quality and which might continue to perpetuate the gaps between higher education and the cultural sector.**

First of all, there seems to be a lack of congruence between the MCS and the Ministry of Education and Science (MES). This hinders the effectiveness of cultural education programmes. Second, there is also a gap between higher education programmes and the actual realities of Kazakhstan's cultural sector. In other words, higher education institutions tend to concentrate on theoretical aspects of a discipline, often completely ignoring its practical aspects. This leads to a scarcity of cultural workers in the sector who are entrepreneurially savvy. Third, in addition to its overly scholastic nature, education in the

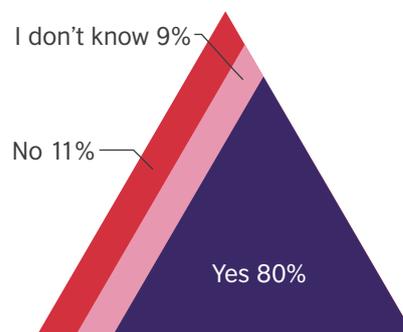
sphere of culture is also overly bureaucratic, which makes it not only very dry, but also rigid, slow and, therefore, inefficient. The fourth problematic aspect is the lack of technical and vocational educational programmes, which reinforces the existing shortage of qualified technical workers who are vitally needed to support artistic activity (for example, stage set up, lighting). Interestingly, the fifth and final problem uncovered through this research possibly lies in the students themselves, who seem to lack motivation and drive.

**Does your sector lack any technical professionals?**



Data drawn from 66 surveys

**Does your sector lack any administrative specialists?**



Data drawn from 65 surveys

## Cultural management needs

The data gathered through the interviews with cultural practitioners showed that there is a significant gap in management-related needs in both public and independent cultural sectors. On one hand, interviewees pointed to a severe shortage of capable managers and administrators in their respective sectors, who would be able to support and guide creative workers. On the other hand, the interviewees expressed the view that creative workers themselves are lacking in managerial and entrepreneurial skills. 'Project management' skills seem to be among the most wanted, according to interview respondents.

Furthermore, the research uncovered that cultural workers and companies in Kazakhstan also lack business strategy skills. Public cultural institutions, in particular, seem to be ineffective in this respect.

This is understandable, given that most public institutions of culture continue to receive their funds almost entirely from the government. The representatives of the independent cultural sector, by definition, have to pay more attention to business strategy skills to ensure their survival. However, some respondents pointed out that private cultural institutions still have weaknesses in setting up long-term business strategies and understanding their respective sectors as a whole.

Classes related to entrepreneurship, project management, strategic planning, marketing, and finance are almost completely absent from higher and vocational education programmes related to the cultural sector. In addition there are very few higher education programmes that prepare managers that specialise in the arts and cultural management.



So the cultural education system in Kazakhstan releases graduates into the cultural sector who are not able to effectively manage their projects and follow a sustainable career path. For this reason many creators are eventually forced to leave the cultural sector in order to pursue other careers that are perceived to be more stable and profitable. This situation is further complicated by a shortage of professional art/cultural managers who would be able to guide and assist the creators.

The research found that many experienced cultural professionals have acquired their entrepreneurial and managerial skills on the job, rather than through specialised training. Interview participants, predominantly from the independent

sector, identified a persistent lack of fundraisers, producers and finance skills across many cultural sub-sectors. Furthermore, the lack of marketing, public relations and audience development is another widespread issue among cultural professionals. Likewise, skills necessary for partnerships and collaborative work with various entities also seem to be in short supply in the cultural sector in Kazakhstan. These gaps lead to the situation where cultural workers find it difficult to generate a meaningful dialogue with their counterparts, policymakers, sponsors and other potential partners, as well as effectively communicate with their audiences.





## Technical needs for the cultural sector

The research data also highlighted a series of technical skills gaps across all sub-sectors. According to the respondents, the music sector is lacking in technical and creative innovations. Many experts noted a weak technical base in the music industry and the inability to work with the existing resources (i.e. technologies and equipment). This could be partially explained by the small size of Kazakhstan's music sector. While the sector is growing, it still remains small and therefore insufficient to provide permanent employment for advanced technical personnel. Besides, the sector is also isolated from the rest of the world, as very few of the technical workers know foreign languages or travel abroad for work-related or training purposes. Among the technical skills needed in the music sector, the most acute ones relate to lighting and decoration (necessary for live performances).

In the case of the **performing arts**, there appears to be a severe shortage of the following technical specialists: light directors and artists, stage directors, sound engineers, stage engineers, technologists, costume designers and theatre make-up artists. These shortages have detrimental effects on the sector as they hinder the arrival

of innovative solutions, new digital technologies, young directors and fresh repertoire. Due to these shortages, technical professionals are often invited from the film sector despite the difference in the sectors' specificities.

While the **visual arts** sector lacks in art managers and curators, it also has a need for more technical workers who contribute to the construction of facilities, packaging, transportation and installation of art objects. For technically challenging/demanding projects, curators and artists prefer to invite specialists from abroad. The research also identified that the use of new technologies, as well as the innovative use of video, light and sound solutions will be of interest to young artists and curators. This could be useful for both generating new creative ideas as well as for improving technical implementation at various exhibitions and installations.

Within the **film** sector there is a serious need for all types of below-the-line technical crew who work with camera, light, sound and post-production. Often such specialists do not have proper training and are usually trained on the job.

Once they master certain applied skills they tend to stick to them, without exploring other options. Co-production with other countries such as the UK would be a great option for the professional development of local technical workers. However, the fact that most of them do not speak English or any other foreign languages hinders these possibilities.

The **design** sector in Kazakhstan suffers from an undeveloped technical base, which is also worsened by a limited availability of resources and materials. Very few universities have their own workshops and necessary technical bases, so subjects such as 'materials science' and 'production technology' remain largely theoretical. Besides having weak domestic industrial production, product and fashion design students have very limited options for internships and job placements locally. As a result, design students graduate being unfamiliar with production cycles and real world equipment. Goods in Kazakhstan are largely produced one piece at a time through a manual or a semi-automated process. Therefore, goods under the 'made in Kazakhstan' label are often inferior in quality and/or not competitive in price. In the fashion industry there is a significant shortage of technical specialists such as pattern cutters, seamstresses and material experts.

The **literature and publishing** sector in Kazakhstan is very small. The desk-based research identified that Almaty and Astana each have only one university that offers a higher education degree specifically in publishing. The small scale of the publishing business could be partly explained by the small domestic market, fierce competition from Russian publishers and the costly nature of the business. The research identified a lack of various technical workers from editors, illustrators and calligraphers to material experts and imposition specialists.

Interview participants who currently work in museums confirmed that there are very few programmes focused precisely at the **museums and cultural heritage** sub-sector and that many people who choose to work in museums come from other disciplines (such as biology, history and philology). This means that newcomers to the sub-sector have to seek additional museum-related qualifications somewhere else (i.e. short courses, workshops etc.) as well as learn extensively on the job. Other weak areas of the museums and cultural heritage sector include the use of ICT and technical equipment (for example, sound and light) as well as communications skills.



# Conclusion

## General considerations

**Certain general considerations have to be taken into account in order to deliver an effective educational programme in Kazakhstan. The research identified a number of key considerations which are outlined below.**

### **Balance between theory and practice**

Higher education institutions in Kazakhstan tend to focus primarily on covering theoretical aspects of a discipline, often completely ignoring its practical aspects. Since cultural education in Kazakhstan seems to be succeeding in delivering theoretical knowledge to students, training programmes should always include practical aspects. Additional educational programmes should aim to teach students to apply their knowledge as well as think critically to be able to solve real-life problems.

### **Sharing knowledge**

Many interview respondents seem to value international expertise and best practice exchange in both administrative and technical fields. They asked for more opportunities to exchange knowledge between Kazakhstan and the UK, as well as other parts of the world. Receiving knowledge and expertise from overseas seems to be particularly useful and desirable, since 75 per cent of survey respondents identified a lack of qualified teachers/professors as one of the barriers which could impede the successful development of new programmes to address skills needs in the cultural sector in Kazakhstan.

### **Infrastructure**

A certain degree of infrastructure is required to deliver programmes in both management and technical fields. Therefore, it is essential to seek partners (i.e. universities and companies) in Kazakhstan with the necessary infrastructure for each of the training programmes.

### **Language barriers**

While younger generations of cultural practitioners tend to speak foreign languages such as English, the majority of cultural workers have never studied or practised any foreign languages or do not know terminology. Not knowing foreign languages can be a significant obstacle for professional development. It results in Kazakhstan's cultural workers only being able to seek training opportunities in mainly Russian speaking countries, and makes collaborations beyond these countries very problematic. For this reason, to ensure the long-term development prospects of students, new training programmes should also aim to improve the level of English and their knowledge of professional terminology.

Based on the research findings, the report proposes some suggestions to help address the skills gaps that exist in the Kazakhstan's cultural sector. Some of the suggestions are summarised here.

## Models for programmes in cultural management

### Project management

As the research data has clearly indicated a lack of project management-related skills across all seven cultural sub-sectors, this module programme aims to help professionals exercise a wide range of skills necessary for effective delivery of a cultural project. This programme is aimed at middle and senior management specialists in the cultural sector. Participants of this programme will be encouraged to exchange their previous project management experiences for collective analysis of successful and unsuccessful projects. This programme includes theoretical and applied cycles.

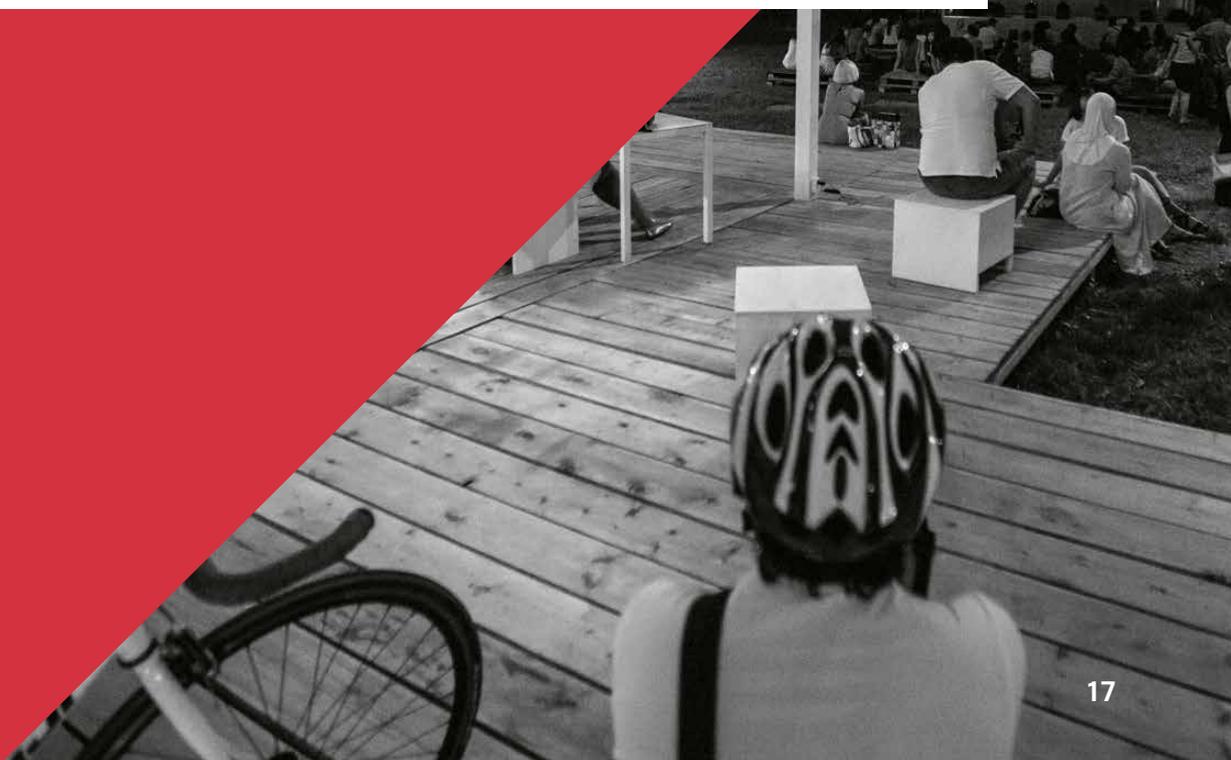
### Business education and culture

As a response to the lack of management skills in the cultural sector, this programme aims to engage more students from

business schools in the cultural sector. The programme would arrange experimental cultural projects and/or arrange internships in existing ones in order to enable students to exercise their (recently gained) management skills and learn about the specificities of working within cultural sub-sectors.

### Networking and communication

Despite the small size of the cultural sector in Kazakhstan, cultural practitioners expressed a need to improve the skills related to communication and networking. A programme in this area should be a short series of seminars covering topics such as negotiating, working/ collaborating with interdisciplinary partners, and presentation skills. This, in turn, could help strengthen ties in the cultural community and give impetus to new interdisciplinary collaborations.



### **Other management-related programmes**

Another useful programme for the cultural practitioners and students could be in the form of open lectures covering successful international experiences and practices in cultural management and marketing, but also policymaking and governance. More education programmes are needed that will encourage local cultural practitioners to engage with research and inspire them to **think critically and creatively**. For example, in the design and fashion sectors this could be done via short workshops that would first allow the students to research the available materials and analyse the needs of the market. Only then would they develop practical and creative solutions to the given problems with the materials available to them. Finally, there is also a need for an education programme that will improve the marketing and audience development skills of cultural workers in Kazakhstan.

### **Models in programmes for technical skills**

We propose two types of programmes for the development of technical skills: 1) longer one-year programmes and 2) short seminars and exchange programmes. The one-year programmes would be more suitable for recent graduates in the cultural sector or students who are working towards a culture/art-related degree and wish to expand/

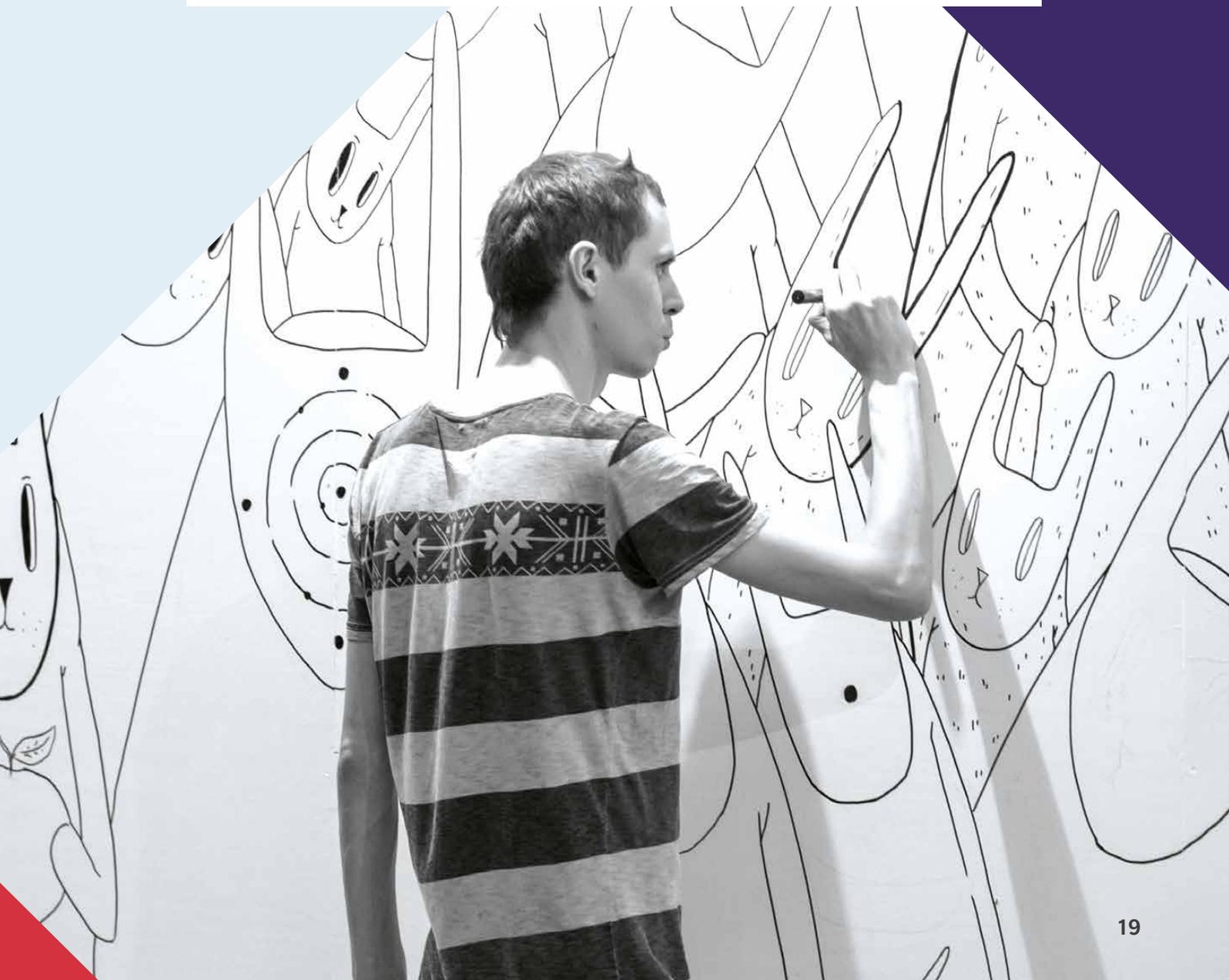
strengthen their skillset. These intense programmes should avoid general education subjects, but should be built around practical modules with mandatory internships in the performing arts companies of Kazakhstan. To ensure the long-term development prospects of students, practical lessons should be accompanied by training in technical English for their respective field. Such a programme has the potential to help recent graduates to build vital technical skills on top of their solid theoretical knowledge acquired at university. Such programmes could help to address the acute lack of below-the-line technical crew who work with camera, light, sound and post-production in the audiovisual sectors (film, television, web, radio). Also, programmes like this would help in addressing the shortage of highly qualified technical workers (for example, technical directors, lighting designers, set designers, sound engineers) to meet the needs of the expanding performing arts sectors in Almaty and Astana.

Such programmes should also be open to willing cultural workers, but according to the interview respondents not many of the practising cultural workers will be able to take so much time off work. To address a wider pool of practising professionals and include those with busy schedules, we propose shorter programmes.

**Seminars and exchange programmes for technical workers**

Kazakhstan's cultural workers would benefit from a series of short programmes like seminars and workshops targeted at all seven sub-sectors. Innovative production techniques and technology would be among the most appropriate topics for such seminars. Exchange programmes (both ways) would also

be helpful. By sending Kazakhstani professionals to the UK and also welcoming specialists from abroad would generate a meaningful exchange of expertise. The MCS and the MES would be relevant partners for such projects, but it may also be possible to collaborate directly with the cultural institutions in Kazakhstan.



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