



IQAA

**INDEPENDENT QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY
FOR EDUCATION (IQAA)**

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Adaptation of Kazakhstani universities to new educational realities: challenges and prospects

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Introduction

The modern world is characterised by the rapid development of science, technology and information technology, influencing all spheres of society, including the education system. Education plays a key role in social and economic progress, as well as in personal growth and development. Therefore, the need for constant adaptation of the educational environment to new challenges and requirements arising from changes in the world becomes obvious.

HEIs are one of the main elements of the educational system, fulfilling important functions of training qualified specialists, developing scientific and innovative activities, as well as forming cultural and value bases. However, HEIs are also exposed to modern requirements and changes in the educational environment, which requires them to be flexible, mobile and of higher quality. In this regard, there is a need to analyse how HEIs adapt to new conditions, what challenges and prospects they face, as well as what strategies and practices they use to improve their competitiveness and efficiency.

In turn, the adaptation of higher education systems to new educational realities should be reflected in quality assurance processes, and this can only be achieved through continuous constructive dialogue between stakeholders.

This means that accreditation agencies also need to adapt their internal processes to the new norms. Particular attention should be paid to the fact that the role and abilities of the agencies are key factors for the effective functioning of the whole system, as it is their responsibility to ensure that all participants in the process clearly understand the new criteria and requirements and comply with them properly.

The Independent Quality Assurance Agency in Education (IQAA) does not just provide services for assessing the quality of education, but also actively co-operates with HEIs in the development of quality culture and innovative approaches aimed at improving quality, supports them in finding optimal solutions to improve educational processes and outcomes.

1. General overview of changes in the legislative framework of the RK in the sphere of higher education and quality assessment of education

In order to improve the quality of specialist training, the Government of Kazakhstan has carried out significant reforms in the education system, including higher education, over the past 5 years.

In 2018, amendments and additions were made to the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan ‘On Higher Education’, aimed at improving the quality and competitiveness of higher education, expanding academic freedom and autonomy of educational organisations, and strengthening responsibility for violations of legislation in the field of education.

In 2019, a new State Programme for the Development of Education and Science for 2020-2025 was adopted, which defined strategic priorities and goals for the development of the education and science system, as well as mechanisms and indicators for their achievement.

In 2020, a new State Educational Standard for Higher and Postgraduate Education (SES HE) was approved in 2023, which provides for a transition to a competence-based approach to training specialists, taking into account the results of non-formal education, introduction of microqualifications, nano-credits and buildable degrees.

In 2023, the Concept of Development of Higher Education and Science in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2023-2029 was approved, which defined the vision, basic principles and approaches to the development of higher and postgraduate education, lifelong learning and science. The Concept provides for the implementation of the following directions: increasing accessibility and advanced staffing of higher and postgraduate education; development of infrastructure and digital architecture of higher education; internationalisation of higher and postgraduate education; development of the third mission of the university; development of the system of lifelong learning and recognition of the results of non-formal education; development of the certification system and expansion of the population coverage of non-formal education; increasing the digital competencies of citizens; increasing the digital competencies of citizens; improving the digital competencies of the population; improving the quality of education; improving the quality of life of the population; and improving the quality of education and the quality of life of the population.

At the same time, over the past five years, Kazakhstan has adopted a number of legislative changes aimed at improving the quality of education and strengthening the role of accreditation in the higher education system. In 2019, the powers of accreditation agencies were expanded and the possibility of accreditation of higher

education institutions according to international standards was envisaged. In 2020, the requirement for accreditation of all higher education institutions was legislatively established, and the procedure and conditions for recognition of the results of accreditation conducted by foreign organisations were established. In 2021, the criteria and indicators of the quality of education were specified and the mechanisms of control over compliance with the accreditation requirements were improved.

The above legislative changes were introduced to enhance the prestige and competitiveness of Kazakhstani higher education, as well as to ensure the protection of the rights and interests of students, employers and society.

2. Analysing the adaptation of HEIs to new educational realities

The purpose of this thematic analysis is to review the main trends and factors that affect the adaptation of HEIs to modern requirements and changes in the educational environment, as well as to analyse examples of successful and unsuccessful practices of HEIs' adaptation to modern requirements. The external audit reports of 14 higher education institutions (Appendix 1, 2) undergoing IQAA institutional accreditation in 2022 and 2023 were used as the main source of data.

2.1 Development and implementation of educational programmes

After the amendments and additions to the Law on Education in 2018, academic freedom and autonomy of educational organisations became more significant. This law has provided HEIs with the opportunity to respond faster to challenges, develop their own educational programmes and adapt to modern requirements.

The development of educational programmes is a time-consuming, voluminous and very responsible process, because according to the state general education standard, the educational programme should reflect the current and foreseeable needs of society and the state, take into account the requirements of employers and be aimed at the formation of competencies of students corresponding to the chosen field of study.

The analysis of the data of Standard 6 'Educational programmes: their development, effectiveness, continuous monitoring and periodic evaluation' has shown that HEIs develop their educational programmes in accordance with the established requirements of the State Compulsory Standard, 'Guidelines for the development of educational programmes of higher and postgraduate education' developed by the National Centre for Higher Education Development MNVO and

their own regulatory documents. Here we can note the HEIs, whose own normative documents are thoroughly elaborated and demonstrated a good understanding and application of the GOSS in the field of EP development and implementation. These are Karaganda University named after Academician E.A. Buketov, Taraz Regional University named after M.Kh. M. Auezov, S. Utebaev Atyrau University of Oil and Gas.

According to the established requirements specified in the above documents, both HEI representatives, employers and students should participate in the development of the Programme of Study. The data of VEC reports show that the analysed HEIs in their majority actively involve employers and students in the development of their EPs. However, in some HEIs it is possible to note a formal approach to this requirement. For example, during the interviews, students of International Taraz Innovation Institute, Shymkent University and Almaty Technological University could not give a clear answer as to what their participation in the discussion and development of EP is. In addition, the employers of Almaty Technological University and Karaganda University named after academician E.A. Buketov could not confirm their participation in the development and updating of the EP.

According to regulatory documents, the development of educational programmes is assigned to Academic Committees, however, according to the reports, the role and activities of Academic Committees are not clearly traced in all HEIs in the development of EPs. All functions and responsibilities are mainly assigned to specialised departments. The work of Academic Committees is noted in the following HEIs - M. Auezov South Kazakhstan University, M. Auezov International University. M. Auezov South Kazakhstan University named after M. Auezov, International University of Astana, Karaganda University named after M. A. Buketov. E.A. Buketov South Kazakhstan University named after M. Auezov, Astana International University, Karaganda University named after E.A. Buketov, Kyzylorda University 'Bolashak', Turan-Astana University, Atyrau University of Oil and Gas named after S. Utebaev, Almaty Technological University, Academy of Physical Culture and Mass Sports, Miras University.

Expertise and updating of educational programmes is an important process that allows taking into account changes in the labour market and the interests of students. Higher education institutions have the task to update educational programmes on the basis of existing professional standards. If there are no such standards, they should be based on employers' proposals. According to the data of expert reports, in the analysed HEIs the updating of educational programmes is regular. Available professional standards are analysed and transferred to educational standards, employers and students take part in the updating of educational

programmes. This process is well established in such universities as Karaganda University named after academician E.A. Buketov, South Kazakhstan University named after M. Auezov, Tatarstan University named after M. Auezov. M. Auezov University of South Kazakhstan, M.H. Dulati Taraz Regional University and M.H. Dulati University of Karaganda. M.H. Dulati Regional University, etc. However, there are universities (Atyrau University of Oil and Gas named after S. Utebaev), where this process is fragmented and formal.

Innovative educational programmes. Innovative education implies learning in the process of creating new knowledge through the integration of fundamental and applied science, direct educational process and practice. It is obvious that the educational process based on innovative educational programmes should be carried out in the mode of integration of HEIs with leading research and innovation centres, manufacturing enterprises and firms, other social partners. It should include such forms as project development, trainings, internships in production and research organisations. According to the reports of the external expert group and data from the unified platform of higher education show that South Kazakhstan University named after M. Auezov implements such forms as project development, training, internships in production, research organisations. M. Auezov South Kazakhstan University implements 27 innovative programmes, including 8 bachelor's degree programmes, 18 master's degree programmes, 1 doctoral degree programme, Karaganda University named after M. A. Buketov, Karaganda University named after E. A. Buketov, and Karaganda University named after E. A. Buketov. E.A. Buketov Karaganda University - 10 innovative educational programmes, including 8 bachelor's degree programmes, 1 master's degree programme, 1 doctoral degree programme, Kazakh National University of Arts - 1 bachelor's degree programme 6B02138 Art-Design. It is worth noting the positive practice of South Kazakhstan University named after M. Auezov, as in recent years a large number of innovative educational programmes have been developed, which were included in the register of educational programmes National Centre for Development of Higher Education of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Joint educational programmes. Joint and dual degree programmes are important in today's world because they enhance the educational experience of students by providing access to the resources and expertise of several institutions. They also promote intercultural understanding and international student mobility, which is important in a globalised world. Through the analysis of 14 External Expert Committee reports, 4 higher education institutions implementing dual degree programmes were identified. According to the data from the unified platform of higher education, Astana International University registered 9 bachelor and master double-diploma educational programmes, including 3 active ones (6B04107

International Trade and Economics, 6B04108 Business Administration with International University of Business and Economics (China), 7M01703 Teaching English as a Second Foreign Language with Webster University) and 6 new double-diploma educational programmes, Taraz Regional University named after M.H. Dulati with M.H. Dulati International University in Taraz. M.H. Dulati is currently implementing 2 dual degree programmes - the innovative 7M07203 Petroleum Engineering with Ufa State Petroleum Technical University and the new 7M06113 Corporate Information Systems and Technologies with Polytechnic Institute of Bragança, Portugal. South Kazakhstan University named after M.Auezov has registered 10 double-diploma Master's programmes, including 1 operating 7M07320 Construction jointly with Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, 5 innovative and 4 new ones. Of these, 7 educational programmes are implemented jointly with Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, 2 jointly with Samara State Technical University and one with Mirzo Ulugbek National University of Uzbekistan. Karaganda University named after Academician E.A. Buketov has registered 3 bachelor's degree educational programmes, including 2 active bachelor's degree educational programmes 6B11302 Logistics (by branches) jointly with St. Petersburg Peter the Great Polytechnic University, 6B01705 Foreign Language: two foreign languages (English) jointly with Tashkent State Pedagogical University named after Nizami. To strengthen the competitiveness of graduates in the world educational arena, some universities (Kazakh National University of Arts) were recommended to develop and implement an action plan aimed at creating joint educational programmes, double degree programmes with leading foreign universities on the profile of staff training.

Working towards the implementation of joint educational programmes will allow HEIs to expand their resources to create more diverse and quality educational programmes, increasing their attractiveness for students. HEIs should understand that joint programmes are a recognised tool for increasing the competitiveness of HEIs and, consequently, of national/regional education systems. This creates a favourable base for the development of joint international educational programmes, one of the positive effects of which is the enrichment of existing programmes with innovative elements.

Thus, through the development of joint educational programmes Kazakhstani universities have the opportunity to enter the educational markets of other countries, which is an important moment for the employment of future graduates.

Educational programmes in English. In the conditions of transformation and integration processes covering the world space, the need for knowledge of English language acquires a special role. One of the priority tasks in the sphere of Kazakhstani higher education is to enter the global educational environment, which

increases the competitiveness of specialists in the global labour market. In the conditions of the tendency of internationalisation of education, the issue of training by higher education institutions of specialists who speak several languages, in particular English, is of particular importance. According to the results of analysis of reports of the external expert group, in 4 out of 14 universities (M. Auezov South Kazakhstan University, S. Utebaev Atyrau University of Oil and Gas, E.A. Buketov Karaganda University, Almaty Technological University), which passed institutional accreditation in 2022 and 2023, educational programmes are taught in English.

Educational programmes with dual training. The age of technological progress requires rapid adaptation of specialists in any sphere to the changing requirements of production. This can be achieved with an appropriate level of investment in education and close interrelation of educational processes with the labour market. To ensure these conditions, many developed countries have introduced dual training. This system has been adopted by other countries, in particular Kazakhstan. Higher education institutions closely cooperate with employers, who request what kind of specialists they need and partially or fully finance their training, which takes place on the basis of their enterprises. According to the reports of the external expert commission, 8 out of 14 higher education institutions implement dual education (Academy of Physical Education and Mass Sports, International Taraz Innovation Institute, International University of Astana, Taraz Regional University named after M.Kh. Dulati, Shymkent University, M. Auezov South Kazakhstan University, Miras University, S. Utebaev Atyrau University of Oil and Gas, Buketov Karaganda University, Almaty Technological University, Turan-Astana University, Kazakh National University of Arts). However, some universities do not fully implement it. For example, it is recommended that Karaganda University named after Academician E.A. Buketov and the Kazakh National University of Arts to strengthen the work in this area by increasing the number of disciplines taught in the dual format of education to improve the quality of training using a practice-oriented approach.

Another innovation of recent years in the system of higher education is to provide students with an opportunity to learn additional competences within the framework of additional educational programme (Minor) along with the main educational programme (Major). Analysis of the reports of the external expert commission showed that many universities (M. Auezov South Kazakhstan University, M.H. Dulati Taraz Regional University, Kazakh National University of Arts, Turan-Astana University) have developed separate Minor catalogues. This shows that educational institutions understand that such advantages of an additional educational programme as the expansion of students' knowledge and competencies,

increasing their competitiveness in the labour market increase the attractiveness of the educational programme as a whole. However, some problems related to insufficient awareness and motivation of students, inconsistency of selection and evaluation criteria, lack of resources and staff (Kazakh National University of Arts, Miras University, Kyzylorda University ‘Bolashak’) were also identified.

2.2 Taking into account the results of non-formal education

In the framework of new educational reforms, accounting for non-formal education outcomes is becoming an increasingly important aspect. HEIs have now started to recognise and take into account non-formal education outcomes such as courses, certificates and trainings. However, this process has some differences depending on the particular university. It is important for universities to be transparent about their rules and procedures for accounting for non-formal education.

According to external evaluation reports, universities have started to recognise learning outcomes obtained through non-formal education in accordance with approved rules and procedures. However, this work is still underdeveloped and requires further exploration of mechanisms and improvement of methods of accounting and evaluation of non-formal education. For example, the external audit report noted that the International Taraz Innovation Institute does not recognise the results of non-formal education. In Kyzylorda University ‘Bolashak’ according to the results of interviews revealed insufficient awareness of students about formal and non-formal learning as a result of - low percentage of students who have taken formal and non-formal training courses, such as Coursera, Khan academy, Edx and so on. Almaty Technological University has ‘Regulations on the recognition of learning outcomes of formal and non-formal education’, but the analysis of this provision revealed that mainly carried out recognition of learning achievements obtained through academic mobility programme. Taraz Regional University named after M.H. Dulati has a mechanism of recognition of language skills based on the results of IELTS/TOEFL exams, as well as DAAD certificates. In addition, the university has its own mechanism for transfer/recognition of academic credits obtained as a result of mobility, exchange programmes, as well as informal additional training and so on. In Karaganda University named after Academician E.A. Buketov the procedure of recognition and crediting of credits, mastered by students earlier in the formal, non-formal and informal education, is carried out according to the Regulations on the procedure of re-crediting, re-certification of disciplines and elimination of academic difference. There is a practice of recognition of results, which is carried out by determining the degree of correspondence of the

profile of non-formal education to the profile of a particular educational programme. In the case of compliance, the potential focus of non-formal education on the expected learning outcomes of the educational programme is established. In case of a favourable decision, which is formalised by a protocol, the registrar's office adds disciplines to the electronic database of record of learning achievements, indicating credits and grades, which are subsequently entered in the Diploma Supplement. In other HEIs, there is no mention of recording the results of non-formal education.

One of the elements of educational reforms of recent years, aimed at improving the quality of education and development of student autonomy is a syllabus, which should reflect all the necessary information for successful mastering of the discipline. It is necessary to draw the attention of HEIs to the fact that students should understand the assessment criteria. Data from the reports of the external expert commission show that although the content of the syllabus is regularly improved, the procedure for assessing knowledge is not sufficiently developed and does not reflect the specifics and features of the discipline. Such recommendations were given to Shymkent University, International Taraz Innovation Institute, International University of Astana, Almaty Technological University.

2.3 Formation of the student contingent

Admission of students on the basis of their achievements is one of the ways to improve the quality of education. Nowadays, due to the provision of autonomy and academic freedom, HEIs have such an opportunity. If we look at the data of external audit, HEIs carry out purposeful work on the selection and admission of 'their' applicant. To this end, higher education institutions organise career guidance work to varying degrees. Educational institutions provide digital support for the admission procedure, post necessary information about admission, special examinations and entrance tests of professional orientation on official websites, social networks, create Telegram bots and virtual admission committees.

To attract more applicants, regional universities provide discounts on tuition fees for various categories, such as orphans, students without parental care; winners of international or national subject Olympiads, scientific projects, sports competitions and art contests; winners of the maximum score on the results of testing, etc.

There is a positive practice of admission for targeted training at the request of specific employers. This is stated in the reports of external audit of Atyrau Oil and Gas University named after S. Utebaev. In addition, a branch of the Russian State University of Oil and Gas was established in this university and it is planned to issue

bachelor's degree in the format of double diplomas. This also has a positive effect when students choose a higher education institution.

Having analysed the reports on higher education institutions in terms of admission of students, we would like to note that educational institutions work to a different extent on the formation of the student contingent with the use of various methods and forms of vocational work. But there are objective factors that directly affect the quantitative and qualitative indicators of enrolment. Such large universities with an established long-term image as Karaganda University named after academician K.E. Buketov, South Kazakhstan University named after M. Auezov increase their indicators every year. In profile universities such as the Academy of Justice under the Supreme Court of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kazakh National University of Arts, the Academy of Physical Culture and Mass Sports, Atyrau University of Oil and Gas named after S. Utebaev are 'their' applicants. Unfortunately, this situation greatly reduces the quality indicators.

3. Inferences

Strengths:

- The Government of Kazakhstan's implementation of significant educational reforms to improve the quality of specialist training, including the expansion of academic freedom and autonomy;
- HEIs utilise the opportunities offered by autonomy and academic freedom.
- HEIs, despite the difference in legal status, form of ownership, number of students, period of existence, profile orientation, carry out educational activities and develop their own educational programmes within the framework of new educational reforms;
- Strengthened vocational guidance work of regional HEIs to attract applicants;
- work has begun on the introduction of a system of recording the results of non-formal education.

3.1 Recommendations

When drafting the recommendation, the Independent Agency for Quality Assurance in Education took into account the specifics of HEIs and at the same time sought to focus on the general problems of adaptation of Kazakhstani HEIs to the new educational realities.

- Develop transparent mechanisms for assessing learning outcomes, including assessment of non-formal education, to better understand students' achievements and improve the quality of the educational process.

- To create a system of monitoring and analysing the flow of applicants, as well as the efficiency of student admission, in order to promptly respond to changes and optimise admission processes.

- Improve mechanisms to support the adaptation of students coming from the regions, including housing, social adaptation and study support.

- Integrate a variety of assessment methods that will take into account the specificity of disciplines and provide a more complete understanding of students' level of achievement.

- Improve clear assessment criteria and feedback systems to ensure the objectivity of assessments and fairness of the assessment process for all students.

- Systematically conduct research and analysis of labour market needs to identify relevant areas of development and create innovative educational programmes.

- More actively develop partnerships with foreign universities to create joint educational programmes, exchange students and teachers, as well as joint research.

- Develop cooperation with local enterprises and organisations to create joint programmes that meet the needs of the labour market.

- More actively develop partnerships with employers to develop and implement dual programmes, including the provision of practical placements for students.

- Develop and implement programmes to train teaching staff to teach in English to ensure high quality education at the international level.

- Support international co-operation and exchange of students and teachers with foreign universities to enrich the educational environment and improve the quality of teaching in English.

Conclusion

Educational institutions have not only rights but also great responsibilities to society and the state. Accreditation agencies play an important role in this process, helping HEIs to find optimal ways to develop a quality culture.

Irrespective of differences in legal status, form of ownership and student population, all HEIs are actively developing educational programmes within the framework of new reforms. However, the quality and effectiveness of programmes depend on many factors: effective management, qualified teachers, material and technical base, research work and interaction with employers and the public.

The analysis has shown that the quality of educational programmes does not depend on the characteristics of the HEI. All educational institutions strive to meet the requirements and constantly work on improvement. And here it is important to emphasise the role of accreditation agencies that help HEIs to develop research and innovation activities, attract qualified personnel and expand international cooperation.

List of sources used

1. External audit reports of HEIs that have passed the procedure of institutional accreditation in the Independent Agency for Quality Assurance in Education.
2. Concept of development of higher education and science in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2023 - 2029. Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated 28 March 2023 No. 248.
3. Order of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated 20 July 2022 № 2 ‘On approval of the state obligatory standards of higher and postgraduate education’.
4. Unified platform of higher education. Register of educational programmes.

Appendix 1

List of Universities externally audited in the period 2022-2023 considered for thematic analysis:

1. Academy of Justice under the Supreme Court of the Republic of Kazakhstan.
2. Academy of Physical Culture and Mass Sports.
3. International Taraz Innovation Institute.
4. International University of Astana.
5. Taraz Regional University named after M.H. Dulati.
6. Shymkent University.
7. Karaganda University named after academician E.A. Buketov.
8. M. Auezov South Kazakhstan University.
9. Miras University.
10. Atyrau University of Oil and Gas named after S. Utebaev.
11. Almaty Technological University.
12. Kyzylorda University 'Bolashak'.
13. Turan-Astana University.
14. Kazakh National University of Arts.

Information on HEIs of their VEC reports

№	Name of the university	Legal status	Year of foundation	Number of educational programmes			Contingent	Level of compliance with the standard	
				Bachelor's degree	Master's programme	Doctoral studies		6	5
1.	Academy of Justice under the Supreme Court of the Republic of Kazakhstan	Republican State Institution	2016	-	1	-	64	Complete	Complete
2.	Academy of Physical Culture and Mass Sports	Limited Liability Partnership	2021	2	-	-	252	Complete	Significant
3.	International Taraz Innovation Institute	Institution	2008	33	27	-	7 498	Significant	Significant
4.	International University of Astana	Limited Liability Partnership	2018	16	10	6	2 985	Complete	Complete
5.	Taraz Regional University named after M.H. Dulati	Non-profit joint-stock company	1958	123	104	10	15 961	Significant	Significant
6.	Shymkent University	Institution	2001	25	8	-	7 058	Complete	Significant
7.	M. Auezov South Kazakhstan University	Non-profit joint-stock company	1943	154	108	27	24 900	Complete	Complete
8.	«MIRAS» University	Institution	1997	24	7	-	6 443	Complete	Significant
9.	Atyrau University of Oil and Gas named after Safi Utebayev	Non-profit joint-stock company	1959	25+1 applied bachelor degree	6+5MBA	2	2 242	Significant	Complete
10.	Karaganda University named	Non-profit joint-stock company	1938	100	74	17	13 593	Complete	Complete

	after Academician E.A. Buketov								
11.	Almaty Technological University	Joint-stock company	1957	26	35	13	7 361	Complete	Complete
12.	Kyzylorda University «Bolashak»	Limited Liability Partnership	2001	39	6	-	4 085	Significant	Complete
13.	«Turan-Astana» University	Institution	1998	19	16	1	2 712	Complete	Complete
14.	Kazakh National University of Arts	Republican State Institution	1998	57	33	11	1 930	Complete	Complete