

feedback
on the IQAA thematic analysis

**‘Adaptation of Kazakhstani higher education institutions to new educational realities:
challenges and prospects’**

New educational realities require universities not only to comply with regulatory requirements, but also to be able to rapidly restructure their academic, administrative and partnership processes. In this context, the IQAA thematic analysis ‘Adaptation of Kazakhstani Higher Education Institutions to New Educational Realities: Challenges and Prospects’ is of particular significance, as it examines the adaptation of universities as a comprehensive process linked to academic freedom, the updating of educational programmes, the development of non-formal education, international cooperation and changing approaches to student recruitment.

At the heart of the analysis lies a question of key importance for higher education in Kazakhstan: to what extent are universities effectively utilising the opportunities afforded by academic autonomy? Greater autonomy for universities creates the conditions for more flexible curriculum development, taking labour market needs into account, introducing innovative approaches and developing new forms of learning. At the same time, autonomy also increases universities’ responsibility for the quality of academic decisions, the transparency of procedures and the meaningful involvement of stakeholders.

Particularly valuable is the attempt to examine the adaptation of universities through specific institutional practices. The analysis shows that Kazakhstani universities generally develop educational programmes in accordance with current requirements; however, the quality of these processes depends on the extent to which academic committees, employers, students and the professional community are involved. This conclusion is of fundamental importance, as the mere existence of an educational programme does not always mean that it truly reflects current competencies, the needs of the sector and students’ expectations.

The document places significant emphasis on the involvement of employers and students in the development and updating of educational programmes. It is here that one of the key challenges of modern academic policy becomes apparent: moving from the formal approval of documents to a substantive partnership. It is important for higher education institutions not merely to record the fact of external stakeholders’ involvement, but to demonstrate which specific proposals were taken into account, and how these influenced the content of courses, learning outcomes, practical training and the subsequent employment of graduates.

Innovative educational programmes are examined in the analysis as one of the mechanisms through which universities respond to changes in the economy, technology and the professional environment. This approach is justified, as a modern university must not only update traditional programmes but also create new educational products focused on interdisciplinarity, project-based learning, applied research, digital skills and engagement with industry. It is important, however, that a programme’s innovative nature is demonstrated not only by its name, but also by its content, resources, staffing and actual demand.

The section on joint and dual-degree programmes is of particular significance. Their development offers Kazakhstani higher education institutions the opportunity to expand their academic resources, enhance their international appeal, increase the mobility of students and staff, and integrate international standards and practices into the educational process. At the same time, the creation of such programmes requires serious institutional preparation: the harmonisation of curricula, language proficiency, sustainable partnerships, a transparent system for the recognition of learning outcomes, and quality assurance at all stages of implementation.

The analysis of degree programmes taught in English deserves special attention. In the context of the internationalisation of higher education, such programmes can become an important tool for enhancing the competitiveness of higher education institutions and their graduates. However, their development must be accompanied by systematic training of academic staff, high-quality teaching and learning resources, academic support for students, and ongoing assessment of the actual

level of language and professional training. Otherwise, the English language may remain merely a superficial sign of internationalisation without having a sufficient impact on the quality of education.

Dual education is presented in this thematic analysis as an important means of strengthening practice-oriented training. Links between universities and businesses, professional organisations and employers enable the curriculum to be aligned more closely with real-world industrial challenges. To further develop this approach, higher education institutions need to expand the range of subjects offered in a dual format, secure stable work placement opportunities, align learning outcomes with professional requirements, and build long-term partnerships with industry.

An interesting aspect is the consideration of MIPOG programmes and non-formal education. These elements reflect a shift towards a more flexible model of higher education, where students are given the opportunity to shape their own educational pathway, supplement their main specialisation with additional skills, and have learning outcomes achieved outside formal educational programmes recognised. To successfully implement such approaches, higher education institutions require clear guidelines for informing students, transparent recognition procedures, high-quality MIPOG catalogues and effective academic counselling.

The issue of student recruitment is explored in the analysis not only as an admissions campaign but also as an element of a university's strategic positioning. Career guidance, digital admissions services, Telegram bots, virtual admissions panels, tailored training programmes requested by employers, and social support for prospective students demonstrate that universities are seeking new ways to attract students. This is particularly relevant for regional universities, which operate amid demographic, economic and infrastructural disparities and are forced to compete for high-calibre students.

The practical value of this thematic analysis lies in the fact that it helps universities to view adaptation not as a one-off response to reforms, but as an ongoing process of institutional development. The findings of this analysis can be used by higher education institutions when reviewing study programmes, developing academic committees, strengthening engagement with employers, implementing the MIPOG system, recognising non-formal education, expanding joint programmes and improving admissions policies.

To further strengthen such analytical materials, it would be advisable to include more comparative data on trends in higher education institutions, the outcomes of implementing innovative and joint programmes, the effectiveness of MIPOG, the recognition of non-formal education, and the impact of new approaches on graduate employment. Brief case studies of universities where academic autonomy has led to specific qualitative changes in educational policy, partnerships, practical training and the student experience would add further value.

Overall, the IQAA's thematic analysis 'Adaptation of Kazakhstani Higher Education Institutions to New Educational Realities: Challenges and Prospects' can be regarded as a substantive and timely document for the higher education system of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Its significance lies in the fact that it presents the adaptation of higher education institutions not as a mere formal compliance with new requirements, but as a more profound transition towards a flexible, accountable and quality-oriented model of university development. Such an analysis contributes to the development of a culture of quality, the strengthening of academic autonomy and the enhancement of higher education institutions' capacity to respond to contemporary educational, social and economic challenges.

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