

**Educational institution
‘CASPIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITY’**



**REVIEW
on a thematic analysis
Best practices at higher education institutions and areas for improvement,
identified from the VEG reports (2022–2025)**

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INTRODUCTION

In the current context of globalisation and dynamic changes in the labour market, the continuous improvement of the quality of the educational process and research activities is becoming a strategic priority for higher education institutions. The work of the Independent Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (IQAA) serves as a vital external tool for verifying the level of institutional development at universities, identifying their competitive advantages and determining the direction of their future transformation.

The thematic analysis presented here, compiled by G.T. Zhumadilova, PhD in Chemistry (Astana, 2026), based on 33 external evaluations covering the period from 2022 to 2025, is highly representative. The study’s findings—according to which 72.7 per cent of higher education institutions received accreditation for five years and 18.2 per cent for seven years—clearly demonstrate the generally stable and high level of compliance by higher and postgraduate education organisations with established standards.

The relevance of this material stems from the need for in-depth reflection and systematisation of the academic community’s accumulated experience. The compilation of 170 examples of best practice and 388 recommendations from external expert groups (hereinafter referred to as EEGs) enables a shift from addressing individual points of criticism to the systematic design of universities’ internal quality assurance frameworks. This review aims to determine the practical value of the report and to formulate proposals for broadening the scope of thematic analyses to improve university management, as well as to adjust strategic development plans.

1. PRACTICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MATERIAL

The practical significance of this report for our university and for higher education in the Republic of Kazakhstan as a whole lies in the following aspects:

1. Application of the competitive benchmarking tool:

A structured collection of best practices – totalling 170 (particularly in the area of *student-centred learning*, with 39 examples) – enables the report to be used as a guide for implementing best practice. In particular, practices such as the awarding of the ‘Student Researcher’ qualification, the operation of specialised laboratories (neuromarketing, earthquake-resistant construction, FabLab) and the introduction of KPI calculators to motivate academic staff. Furthermore, the Higher Education Commission notes as a positive practice that the Student Service Centres operating within universities are staffed by trained specialists and are focused on supporting and assisting students. This practice helps to reduce administrative barriers and foster an environment of trust. Among the positive practices highlighted in higher education institutions is the genuine participation of students in collegial governing bodies, self-governing bodies, student deaneries and student councils. This practice fosters a sense of responsibility and helps build partnerships between the administration and students.

Practical orientation and employer involvement in the delivery of educational programmes – The VEG highlights as a positive practice the involvement of practising professionals and company representatives in delivering guest lectures, as well as the joint development of practical assignments by lecturers and practitioners, which enhances the practical nature of the teaching and increases the employability of graduates in the labour market.

Material and technical resources and educational infrastructure – Experts highlight the creation of a barrier-free environment and conditions for inclusive learning, as well as the development of student infrastructure – including halls of residence, sports facilities, and spaces for independent study and leisure – as well-established positive practices in higher education institutions.

Management and information management – The VEG regards the provision of health insurance for academic staff and employees as a positive practice, as this increases staff satisfaction and demonstrates the university’s commitment to ensuring a high level of social protection for its staff.

Digitalisation of the educational process and administrative procedures – the VEG notes the digitalisation of key processes – from the admissions campaign to academic and administrative management.

Mission, strategic management and planning, corporate culture, transparency of governance, academic integrity and a culture of quality – the alignment of strategic objectives with operational plans and KPIs, as well as staff engagement in understanding and implementing strategic objectives, has been identified as a positive practice. At one of the higher education institutions assessed by the VEG, the external evaluation highlighted a high level of corporate culture, which is regarded as a solid foundation for the internal quality assurance system. The VEG cites as positive examples the participation of higher education institutions in academic integrity associations, the creation of compliance officer roles, and the alignment of internal regulations with international governance standards.

2. Minimising risks during the accreditation process:

The systematisation of 388 areas for improvement serves a preventive function. Universities are given the opportunity to carry out a self-assessment of their most vulnerable areas – which the VEG experts traditionally identify as research activities (55 recommendations), material and technical resources (38 recommendations) and staff capacity development (37 recommendations) – prior to the external audit.

The areas for improvement identified in the VEG reports are categorised into 17 areas, which in turn have been grouped into three categories based on frequency of occurrence: 61.9 per cent of the recommendations, in descending order, relate to research activities and their integration into the curriculum; material and technical resources and educational infrastructure; staff capacity and the development of teaching staff; learning, teaching, assessment and student support; monitoring, data analysis and management decision-making, management and information management; 35.1 per cent of the recommendations relate to internationalisation and academic mobility, mission, strategic management and planning, corporate culture, public communication, transparency in governance, academic integrity and a culture of quality, student engagement, graduate employment, alumni relations, curriculum development, the digitalisation of the educational process and management; and the remaining 3.1 per cent relate to non-formal learning, admissions and careers guidance. Universities can utilise all these indicators in their strategic plans to minimise risks.

3. Optimisation of the internal quality assurance system (hereinafter referred to as IQAS): The results of the analysis confirm the overarching need to improve the assessment of learning outcomes in syllabuses, to implement procedures for the encryption of examination papers, and to develop digital management ecosystems (as exemplified by the integration of Bitrix24, Platonus, Documentolog, etc.). This provides university management with a clear roadmap for digitalisation and academic integrity.

3 PROPOSALS FOR THE FOCUS OF FUTURE IQAA ANALYSES TO IMPROVE UNIVERSITY QUALITY SYSTEMS

With a view to further developing the analytical potential of IQAA research and its practical application by higher education institutions to modernise quality management systems and enhance the effectiveness of the institutions’ quality assurance bodies themselves, it is proposed to initiate thematic analyses in the following areas:

1. ‘The effectiveness of integrating science and education: mechanisms for commercialisation and student involvement in R&D’

Rationale: as the field of scientific research (hereinafter ‘SR’) is recognised by experts as the most problematic area (the majority of the VEG’s recommendations concern publication activity in Scopus/WoS, State Fund/Presidential Centre for Science and Technology grants and start-ups), a separate in-depth analysis is required of higher education institutions demonstrating high performance in commercialisation and the creation of sustainable research schools.

2. ‘Transformation of the internal system for assessing learning outcomes: from test formats to the assessment of comprehensive competences’

Rationale: the report highlights frequent comments from the Higher Education Evaluation Commission regarding the need to reduce the use of formalised tests and to provide a detailed description of assessment criteria in syllabuses. A specialised analysis of best practices in assessment based on criteria and methods for ensuring the objectivity of assessment (including blind peer review and anonymisation) will help universities to restructure their academic policies.

3. ‘The evolution of dual learning and the operating mechanisms of Industrial Committees (Employers’ Councils)’

Rationale: despite the existence of 21 positive examples of practice-oriented education, the VEG experts issued 20 recommendations on strengthening the role of employers in the design of educational programmes. An analysis of specific legal and organisational models of dual education will enable the replication of successful cases of collaboration with the business sector.

4. 'Digital maturity of higher education institutions: experience in building seamless management and educational ecosystems'

Rationale: The study highlights a gap between universities with well-developed digital ecosystems and organisations with weak digital infrastructure. Analytical material on this topic will help to define optimal standards for the digitalisation of processes — from the admissions office (Registrar's Office) to monitoring stakeholder satisfaction.

5. 'Procedures and regulations for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes in higher education'

Rationale: this area has shown the least regulatory development in universities (lack of documents on the recognition of non-formal learning). A thematic analysis of best practices will enable the formulation of uniform methodological approaches at national level.

CONCLUSION

The IQAA's analytical report for the period 2022–2025 is a fundamental work of high scientific and methodological value with a distinct practical focus for the academic community. The Agency has carried out extensive work on breaking down and categorising key trends in the development of higher education in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The objective set for the author, G.T. Zhumadilova, PhD in Chemistry, – to summarise and systematise best practices at universities and in the regions with a view to improvement – has been achieved. The analysed results of institutional accreditation will enable universities to compare their self-assessment results with the strengths of their competitors and to identify systemic

problem areas in their operations. The results of this analysis can be used by universities to improve their internal processes and procedures for ensuring the quality of higher education.

The identified balance between strengths (the development of student-centred approaches, social support and the digitalisation of services) and areas of risk (a shortage of high-impact publications, the need to modernise engineering and technology laboratories, and an increase in the number of academic staff holding academic degrees) enables university management to make operational and strategic decisions based on verified data.

Expanding the range of IQAA thematic analyses in line with the proposed issues will contribute to the further evolution of an internal culture of quality and enhance the international competitiveness of higher education.