

FEEDBACK

on the IQAA thematic analysis

‘Best practices at higher education institutions and areas for improvement identified from the VEG reports for 2022–2025’

The IQAA thematic analysis ‘Best practices at higher education institutions and areas for improvement identified from the 2022–2025 External Evaluation Group (VEG) reports’ provides a substantive summary of the results of institutional accreditation and is of significant practical value for the further development of the higher education system in the Republic of Kazakhstan. The importance of this document lies in the fact that it transforms the results of external evaluation from individual expert reports into a more comprehensive analytical picture, enabling an understanding of higher education institutions’ strengths, recurring areas of risk and areas requiring systematic attention.

Unlike narrowly focused reviews, this analysis covers a broad institutional context. It enables universities to be viewed not only as organisations delivering educational programmes, but also as complex academic systems where quality depends on strategic management, human resource capacity, infrastructure, digitalisation, research activity, student support, engagement with employers and decision-making culture. It is precisely this comprehensive perspective that makes the analysis useful not only for quality assurance units, but also for academic management, heads of departmental units and collegial governing bodies within universities.

The systematisation of best practices is of particular analytical value. The document most prominently highlights practices related to student-centred learning and student support. This demonstrates that, within Kazakhstani higher education institutions, there is a gradually growing understanding of the student not only as a recipient of educational services, but also as an active participant in the academic, research, social and administrative environments. Student service centres, support for individual learning pathways, and the involvement of students in academic competitions, entrepreneurial projects and governing bodies all point to the development of a more open and collaborative model of the university environment.

Equally important is the section devoted to the practical orientation of education and employer involvement. External expert groups note the existence of industry councils, department branches based at enterprises, joint educational initiatives, masterclasses, round-table discussions and other forms of interaction with the professional community. These practices are of particular significance, as the quality of modern higher education cannot be assessed solely on the basis of the existence of curricula and subjects. It must be demonstrated by the extent to which educational programmes are linked to real-world professional challenges, labour market requirements and graduates’ employment prospects.

It is also worth noting that digitalisation, information management and the development of educational infrastructure have been highlighted among the positive practices. The availability of electronic systems, LMS platforms, digital services, modern laboratories, educational and research centres, and specialised spaces demonstrates that the educational environment is becoming one of the key factors in quality. This is particularly important for higher education institutions, as infrastructure development directly influences opportunities for project-based learning, student research, practical training and the implementation of innovative teaching methods.

A strength of the analysis is its balanced approach: alongside successful examples, it highlights areas where universities need to improve. The most substantial set of recommendations relates to research activities and their integration into the educational process. This emphasis appears justified, as a modern university cannot limit itself to teaching alone. The quality of educational programmes depends largely on the research activity of academic staff, student participation in research projects, the existence of research schools, publication output, grant-funding activities, and the university’s ability to translate knowledge into practical solutions for society and the economy.

Particular attention should be paid to the recommendations concerning human resources, material and technical infrastructure, teaching, assessment and quality monitoring. These areas reflect the most critical aspects of institutional development in higher education institutions. Even with a strong strategy and individual successful practices, sustainable quality is impossible without systematic engagement with teaching staff, regular updating of resources, transparent mechanisms for assessing learning outcomes, data analysis and decision-making based on objective information. In this sense, the VEG analysis helps to identify not isolated shortcomings, but the interrelated elements of university development.

The practical significance of the document lies in the fact that it can be used as a benchmark for universities' internal self-assessment. Universities can compare their own processes with the identified best practices and recommendations, identify priority areas for improvement, review their plans for the development of educational programmes, strengthen internal monitoring mechanisms and prepare more substantive corrective measures. The analysis may also serve as useful material for discussion at meetings of academic councils, quality committees, departments and project groups responsible for the development of educational and research activities.

A key strength of this thematic analysis is its practical nature. It does not read like a formal report, but rather highlights which practices are already working in higher education institutions and which issues remain unresolved. This approach facilitates the sharing of best practice across universities and fosters a professional dialogue on the quality of education. This is particularly important for the higher education system, as external evaluation should not only assess compliance with standards but also stimulate development, the exchange of experience and institutional learning.

To further strengthen such analytical materials, it would be advisable to expand the comparative component. In future issues, it would be useful to show the dynamics of change over the years, differences between types of higher education institutions, examples of the successful implementation of the External Evaluation Group's recommendations, as well as clearer indicators enabling an assessment of the impact of the improvements introduced on the quality of educational, research and administrative activities. It could be of added value to include brief case studies of higher education institutions where external evaluation recommendations have been translated into concrete institutional changes.

Overall, the IQAA's thematic analysis 'Positive Practices at Higher Education Institutions and Areas for Improvement Identified from the External Evaluation Group Reports 2022–2025' can be regarded as a timely, substantive and practically useful document. Its significance lies in the fact that it provides an overview of the state of institutional development at higher education institutions, helps to disseminate successful practices and, at the same time, identifies realistic avenues for further quality improvement. Such materials contribute to strengthening a culture of quality, developing an evidence-based approach to management and facilitating universities' transition to a more mature model of internal quality assurance in education.

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