

feedback
on the IQAA thematic analysis
‘Some aspects of ethics and academic integrity in higher education institutions in
Kazakhstan: challenges and prospects’

Trust in a university is built not only through the quality of its educational programmes, research output or material resources, but also through the consistency of ethical standards, the transparency of management decisions and the fairness of the academic environment. In this regard, the IQAA thematic analysis ‘Some Aspects of Ethics and Academic Integrity in Higher Education Institutions in Kazakhstan: Challenges and Prospects’ addresses one of the most important foundations of modern higher education — the ability of a higher education institution to ensure integrity, accountability and openness in all key processes.

In this analysis, academic integrity is viewed not merely as a narrow issue of combating plagiarism, but as a broader institutional culture. This approach is particularly important, as breaches of ethics can manifest not only in students’ written work, but also in governance, the allocation of resources, the handling of complaints, assessment, staffing decisions, communication with stakeholders and the transparency of internal procedures. The value of this analysis therefore lies in the fact that it links academic integrity to the overall system of quality assurance in education.

An important focus of the analysis is the examination of corporate governance mechanisms. The existence of Academic Councils, Boards of Directors, Boards of Trustees and Supervisory Boards indicates that various models of collegial governance are in use at higher education institutions in Kazakhstan. At the same time, the mere existence of such bodies does not in itself guarantee transparency and trust. Of significant importance are the transparency of information regarding the composition and activities of these councils, the prevention of conflicts of interest, the separation of powers, and the genuine participation of independent representatives in decision-making.

It is telling that the analysis highlights the link between corporate governance and ethics. This is an important conclusion, as academic integrity begins not only in the lecture theatre or when writing a dissertation, but at the level of the university’s management culture. If the principles of fairness, transparency and accountability are upheld in the work of governing and collegial bodies, they become part of everyday academic practice and are perceived by those involved in the educational process as genuine, rather than merely declarative, standards.

The section devoted to internal regulatory documents is of particular significance. Kazakhstani higher education institutions have developed codes of ethics, rules on academic integrity, anti-corruption standards, policies and other local regulations. However, for these documents to function effectively, it is important not only that they exist, but also that they are accessible, comprehensible, regularly updated and uniformly published on official websites. The recommendation to synchronise information across different language versions of websites is particularly relevant, as transparency must be ensured for all members of the academic community, including international students and partners.

Mechanisms for monitoring and addressing breaches occupy a special place in the analysis. Ethics committees, disciplinary boards, compliance departments, feedback boxes and helplines, senior management blogs, anti-plagiarism systems and online proctoring form the basis for preventing and responding to breaches. At the same time, the effectiveness of these tools depends on the extent to which they are actually used, how clear the procedures for reporting are, whether summarised statistics on cases reviewed are published, and whether students and lecturers perceive the decisions taken to be fair.

A major advantage of the analysis is that it is not limited to listing existing mechanisms. The document raises the question of their effectiveness: the lack of

a dedicated compliance officer post, insufficient integration of anti-plagiarism systems with learning platforms, poor feedback and a lack of public accountability regarding breaches indicate that academic integrity requires not one-off measures, but a systemic infrastructure of trust. It is precisely this infrastructure that enables the university not only to record breaches but also to prevent them.

Preventive work is regarded as an integral part of shaping academic culture. Seminars, training sessions, tutorial sessions, meetings with representatives of anti-corruption bodies and awareness campaigns help students, lecturers and staff to better understand the standards of ethical conduct. At the same time, the further development of this area should involve a shift from formal information provision to practical training: analysing case studies, teaching correct citation, working with sources, the ethics of using digital technologies, and fostering personal responsibility for academic outcomes.

The issue of academic integrity is becoming particularly relevant in the context of digitalisation and the development of artificial intelligence. Modern tools for text generation, automated translation, information retrieval and assignment preparation are changing the nature of academic risks. It is therefore important for higher education institutions to update their academic integrity policies to take account of new digital practices: to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable use of AI, to teach students to use technology responsibly, and to develop forms of assessment that test independent thinking, reasoning and genuine mastery of competencies.

The involvement of students, academic staff and employers in quality assurance processes is also highlighted as a key element of an ethical environment. The existence of surveys, internal audits, feedback mechanisms and the participation of representatives from the academic community on committees creates opportunities for more transparent governance. However, low student participation in certain collegial bodies indicates that formal representation is insufficient. The student voice must be substantive, well-reasoned and genuinely taken into account in decision-making.

The practical value of this analysis lies in the fact that it helps higher education institutions to view academic integrity as part of institutional development, rather than as a separate disciplinary procedure. Universities can use the findings of this analysis to review their codes of ethics, update their rules for checking written work, strengthen their compliance services, increase the transparency of complaints procedures, develop training on academic integrity, and introduce more open feedback mechanisms.

A promising avenue for further thematic research could be to examine how the ethical mechanisms put in place actually influence the behaviour of students, lecturers and staff. It would also be useful to broaden the analysis to include case studies on the prevention of conflicts of interest, practices for publishing aggregated statistics on breaches, models for the ethical use of artificial intelligence, and a comparative study of the role of student communities in promoting academic integrity.

Overall, the IQAA's thematic analysis 'Some Aspects of Ethics and Academic Integrity in Higher Education Institutions in Kazakhstan: Challenges and Prospects' provides substantive and timely material for the higher education system. Its significance lies in the fact that it presents academic integrity as the foundation of trust, quality governance, fair assessment and a responsible academic environment. Such an analysis facilitates the transition of higher education institutions from the mere formal existence of rules to a more mature culture of integrity, openness and institutional accountability.

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