

on the IQAA thematic analysis

'The activities of higher education institutions in Kazakhstan in the context of compliance with standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area'

European standards and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education set out not only a set of formal requirements for universities, but also a broader philosophy of academic accountability. In this sense, the IQAA thematic analysis 'The Activities of Higher Education Institutions in Kazakhstan in the Context of Compliance with Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area' is of interest as an attempt to examine the practices of Kazakhstani higher education institutions through the prism of an internationally recognised quality framework focused on students, educational resources, support, transparency and continuous improvement.

The pandemic period served as a test of the maturity of universities' internal quality systems. It was precisely during the abrupt transition to distance learning that it became apparent to what extent universities are capable not only of developing policies and regulations, but also of rapidly restructuring actual academic processes: the organisation of classes, access to resources, communication with students, support for teaching staff, the conduct of assessments and the safeguarding of academic integrity. The value of this analysis therefore lies in the fact that it demonstrates compliance with ESG not as an abstract standard, but as a university's practical ability to maintain the quality of education under exceptional circumstances.

An important area highlighted in the analysis is the organisation of university processes through information systems. The use of Platonus, Univer 2.0, in-house platforms, personal accounts, electronic timetables, digital teaching and learning materials, and integrated services demonstrates that digital infrastructure has become a key prerequisite for the continuity of the educational process. What is particularly important here is not the number of platforms, but their ability to function as a unified environment, providing students and lecturers with access to teaching materials, regulations, learning outcomes, communication channels and administrative services.

The practice of organising the teaching process in a distance learning format has shown that Kazakhstani higher education institutions have adopted various models of interaction: synchronous classes, asynchronous study of materials and blended formats. This experience is important for the further development of higher education, as it broadens our understanding of the possibilities for learning. At the same time, the distance learning format requires universities to adopt a more carefully considered pedagogical design: video lectures, presentations and webinars must be complemented by interactive tasks, feedback, independent student work and clear criteria for achieving learning outcomes.

ESG Standard 1.3, which relates to student-centred learning, takes on particular significance in the context of the digital transition. In online and blended learning environments, students need not only access to lecture materials, but also clear course navigation, timely advice, transparent assessment, academic support and the opportunity to interact with their lecturer and fellow students. Therefore, a key strength of the analysis is its focus on how higher education institutions maintained student engagement and ensured the continuation of educational activities amidst restrictions.

Support services for students and academic staff have become one of the most critical elements of university resilience. Virtual drop-in sessions, counselling, helpdesk systems, online career support services and student surveys show that support in the digital environment should not be sporadic, but rather ongoing and institutionally organised. To meet ESG 1.6, it is essential that students have access not only to learning resources but also to timely assistance, technical support, library services, career advice and feedback channels.

Academic integrity in the context of distance learning has become a distinct challenge for higher education institutions. Online examinations, remote identity verification, proctoring, plagiarism checks on written work, and the storage of records and event logs demonstrate that the digital environment requires new mechanisms of trust. However, the issue of academic integrity should not be reduced solely to technical controls. A more sustainable approach involves

fostering a culture of independent work, updating assessment methods, and *utilising* project-based assignments, oral presentations, case studies and other assessment methods *that allow for* the verification of genuine understanding and application of knowledge.

The development of MOOCs is identified in the analysis as one of the promising areas of digital transformation in higher education. Massive Open Online Courses enable wider access to high-quality content, support self-directed learning, enhance academic mobility and foster flexible educational pathways. At the same time, it is important for Kazakhstani higher education institutions to move away from the piecemeal use of external courses towards a more systematic policy: creating their own MOOCs, recognising the outcomes of online learning, integrating courses into educational programmes, and ensuring the quality of digital content.

In the context of digitalisation, the material and technical infrastructure is taking on a new significance. This refers not only to computer labs or internet access, but also to virtual laboratories, equipment for recording lectures, graphics tablets, digital content studios, network infrastructure, electronic libraries and robust platforms for collaborative work. It is particularly important that the analysis highlights both positive practices at universities and limitations: certain types of practical, laboratory and professional sessions cannot be fully transferred online without specialised solutions.

Inter-university and international collaboration during the pandemic proved to be both restricted and revitalised. On the one hand, academic mobility, travel, work placements and in-person academic events were hampered. On the other hand, the digital environment has opened up opportunities for online conferences, webinars, joint seminars, virtual schools and new forms of partnership. This is an important conclusion for the future: international cooperation in higher education must develop not only through physical mobility, but also through sustainable digital formats of interaction.

A distinctive feature of this analysis is that it presents ESG as a practical tool for assessing a university's readiness for change. Compliance with European quality standards is demonstrated not only by the existence of documentation, but also by a university's ability to ensure the continuity of learning, support for students and staff, access to resources, fair assessment, the development of digital competences, and the maintenance of partnerships even in times of crisis. This approach makes the analysis useful for higher education institutions seeking to strengthen their internal quality assurance systems.

To further develop such thematic materials, it would be useful to supplement the analysis with a more detailed comparison of university practices in terms of levels of digital maturity, the quality of student support, the effectiveness of online assessment, the development of MOOCs and the integration of information systems. Case studies of universities where the crisis experience of distance learning has been transformed into sustainable institutional changes – such as the upgrading of Learning Management Systems (LMS), the creation of digital libraries, the introduction of virtual laboratories, the development of online services and new forms of international cooperation – could provide additional value.

Overall, the IQAA's thematic analysis, 'The Activities of Kazakhstani Higher Education Institutions in the Context of Compliance with Quality Assurance Standards and Guidelines in the European Higher Education Area', can be regarded as a substantive and practically significant document. Its main value lies in the fact that it demonstrates the link between the European quality framework and the actual actions of Kazakhstani higher education institutions in the context of the digital transition. Such an analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of ESG, the development of student-centred learning, the strengthening of teaching resources and support services, and the establishment of a more sustainable and accountable system of internal quality assurance in higher education in Kazakhstan.

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