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## **ORGANIZATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS AS A CONSTRUCT OF THE NATIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM: PRACTICE OF KAZAKHSTANI UNIVERSITIES**

**Abstract:** The restructuring of the quality assurance system of higher education in Kazakhstan is considered a condition for the formation of competitive human potential. The research interest of the authors of this article is aimed at the practice of organizing the internal quality assurance system as the first component of the three-dimensional model of the National Quality Assurance System, which also includes the external quality assurance system and mechanisms of management and regulation of the quality assurance system. The activity of Kazakhstani HEIs with orientation on the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in the European Higher Education Area (ESG EHEA) is carried out through the activity of designing a system of measures, including planning, organization and implementation of the actual internal system of quality assurance, adequate to the features of the educational environment of the HEI. As a result of design activity, "author's" normative, organizational, personnel conditions of internal quality assurance systems are created.

The purpose of our research was to analyze the practices of organization of internal quality assurance system by HEIs of Kazakhstan as a construct of the National Quality Assurance System. The study allowed us to identify the common and special in the organization of internal quality assurance systems in the context of the implementation of quality assurance methodology in higher education organizations, in the context of academic freedom.

**Key words:** quality of education, elements of internal quality assurance system, national quality assurance system, constructs of quality assurance system, reengineering of quality assurance system.

**Introduction.** The national system of quality assurance of higher education is considered as a system-forming basis for the formation of human resources potential and intellectual capital of the country. This determines the relevance of the study of the processes of organization of internal quality assurance systems (hereinafter – SIQA) by higher education institutions of Kazakhstan as constructs of the national quality assurance system. The study of SIQA organized by HEIs of Kazakhstan will help to identify the most effective methods and tools of quality management, which, in turn, contributes to improving the quality of education, and increasing the level of training of specialists necessary for the development of the economy and society as a whole.

The purpose of our study is to review the current state of quality assurance systems in HEIs in Kazakhstan, to examine HEIs' understanding of the place of SIQA in the system of strategic priorities of organizations, the principles of quality assurance, and the composition of SIQA in higher education organizations.

Within the framework of the study the task of determining the main elements and structure of quality assurance systems in HEIs of Kazakhstan, including standards, processes, procedures, responsible persons and used tools was solved. The vision of the current state of

internal quality assurance systems is able to complement the activities on the development of methodological tools for quality assurance in HEIs.

**Methods and organization of the study.** In accordance with the purpose and objectives of the study, the method of analysis of secondary data obtained from open sources – documents of HEIs on the organization of the quality of education, which are in the public domain, was used. The main method of the conducted research in the context of the analysis of HEIs' organized SIQA is the review of materials on HEIs' websites. This method allows access to information about strategies, processes and practices of university quality management.

The study of documents on quality policy and standards published on the university's website allows to understand what quality principles and objectives are established by the university, as well as what specific processes and mechanisms are used to achieve them. The materials of the following HEIs' SIQA organization by categories national, international, state are considered:

1. Abai University
2. Astana IT University
3. K. Zhubanov Aktobe Regional University
4. Al-Farabi Kazakh National University
5. Kazakh National Women's Teacher Training University
6. Karaganda University named after academician E.A. Buketov
7. Korkyt Ata Kyzylorda University
8. A. Margulan Pavlodar Pedagogical University
9. M. Kozybaev North Kazakhstan University
10. M. Auezov South Kazakhstan University

The references of the reviewed materials are indicated in the list of literature.

The research attempts to compare the practice of HEIs' organization of internal quality assurance systems and HEI competitiveness in the context of international rating indicators.

The content of HEIs' work is correlated with the general strategy of quality improvement defined in the materials of the National Center for Higher Education Development activities.

**The results of the study and their discussion.** In the trends of economic and scientific-technical development of Kazakhstan, the role of human capital is increasing. Under these conditions, higher education becomes a driving force for a number of key roles, including, firstly, the organization of professional training of students, providing their career prospects; secondly, the creation of new knowledge and technologies aimed at the progress of society and economy.

The implementation of the principle of autonomy of HEIs, defined by the Charter of European Universities as a systemic provision of competitiveness of the organization, after Kazakhstan's entry into the Bologna Process in 2010, required domestic HEIs to implement academic freedom in the activities of higher and postgraduate education organizations (Suleimenova & Omirbaev, 2023).

The task of creating a competitive model of Kazakhstani higher education actualizes the quality assurance of this level of education, aimed at the processes of socio-economic and scientific-technical development of the country, the development of higher education, is defined as central in the state strategy for the development of this level of education (Resolution 248, 2023). Increased attention to the quality of education is associated with changes in educational needs and conditions of their realization, and reflects the provision of inclusive and equitable quality education and promotion of the possibility of "lifelong learning for all". This international initiative, implemented through innovation and strategic thinking, aims to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, adopted by the United Nations as "a blueprint for achieving a better and more sustainable future for all" (United Nations, 2015).

The task of improving the quality of education is relevant to the need to build a competitive level of higher education in the context of international indicators. The systematic approach to ensuring the quality of education at the state level is provided by the activities of the Committee for Quality Assurance in the Field of Science and Higher Education of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Since 2015, the National Center for Higher Education Development has been operating in Kazakhstan, the purpose of which is methodological, scientific, methodological and information-analytical support of the implementation of the Bologna Process, including one of the mandatory parameters – "Quality Assurance of Higher Education".

Kazakhstan scientists actively conduct research on the organization of conditions and resources to ensure and further improve the quality of education in the system of higher education in the framework of grant and program-targeted funding of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Thus, the creation of organizational, information-methodological and other conditions for solving the problem of ensuring the quality of education allowed Kazakhstan to be categorized as a country with a national system of quality assurance (NCHED, n.g.).

At the same time, the task of reconstruction (re-engineering) of the national quality assurance system (hereinafter – NQAS) is currently formulated, which is due to the fact that NQAS should:

- correspond to the changes in educational needs and labor market requirements, take into account the actual skills and knowledge necessary for a successful career;
- comply with international standards of education and requirements for accreditation of higher education institutions;
- be adapted to new technological opportunities and challenges based on the use of information and communication technologies in education.

In general, the re-engineering of NQAS is seen as a strategy to improve the efficiency and attractiveness of education for students and researchers from all over the world, creating a more effective education successfully adapted to modern challenges. Re-engineering of NQAS is supposed to be carried out in the context of developing a model that includes three main sides/components of NQAS: 1) internal quality assurance system; 2) external quality assurance system; 3) mechanisms of management and regulation of the quality assurance system. The researchers see the main goal of this model as the achievement by all three parties/components of "high academic quality, which is called the Q (quality) point" (Omirbaev et al., 2023).

The content of all three components determines the focus of work of organizations of higher and postgraduate education (hereinafter – OHPGE) to ensure compliance with the requirements to the quality of training, the needs of students and employers. That is, "the concept of quality should be considered both from the point of view of the consumer (learner, employer), reflecting compliance with the goal, and from the point of view of compliance with the use or consumption of the educational service (product)" (Omirbaev S.M. & Mukhataev, 2023).

Paying attention to internal quality assurance, we note the continuity and permanence of the process of internal institutional improvement of the quality of education, training and other services in accordance with certain agreed sets of criteria. This process is defined and realized by the HEI itself with the help of appropriate planning methods. Thus, it is about creating a system of internal quality assurance in HEIs through two levels of tasks: firstly, "creating a mechanism that can reform and improve university education in a real, substantial way; secondly, "the ability/responsibility to explain/justify these improvements to stakeholders through a clearly defined set of criteria" (Omirbaev et al., 2023).

The establishment of quality assurance systems within the organization by OHPGE has several significant advantages in the context of NQAS:

1. SIQA allows HEIs to more effectively control and improve learning processes, adapting them to the changing needs of students and labor market requirements. This contributes to improving the level of education, which in turn can improve the country's competitiveness in the global educational space.

2. The creation of the SIQA gives universities greater autonomy in managing their own educational processes. This allows them to respond more flexibly to local needs and peculiarities, which may be more effective than unified approaches adopted at the level of the national education system.

3. An effective SIQA can be a powerful marketing tool for HEIs. High quality ratings and reputation of a reliable educational organization can attract more students, including those from other countries, which helps to strengthen the position of the HEI as a center of educational excellence.

4. The development of SIQA contributes to the transparency and openness of HEIs' activities. It increases the level of trust on the part of students, employers and society as a whole, strengthening the ties between the university and its stakeholders.

Thus, internal quality assurance systems play an important role in improving education at the national level, contributing to its development and competitiveness both in the Kazakh and international markets.

The study of university materials has shown that there is no unambiguously accepted name for the object of study under consideration. Thus, in the materials of universities there is a name in the wording "internal quality assurance system", and in the wording "system of internal quality assurance". In our study, we adopted the position of formulating the object of analysis as "system of internal quality assurance" (SIQA), because in this wording it corresponds to the principles of ESG-analysis, assuming the processes and systems that organizations (in our case – universities) use to control and manage their activities to ensure compliance with quality standards, regulatory requirements and customer expectations. At the same time, we will consider the concept of "internal system of quality assurance" (ISQA), presented in the wording of a number of documents of universities.

Since 2018, taking into account the expansion of autonomy of HEIs, significant changes in the current legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan on the regulation of OHPGEGs' activities in the field of quality assurance of higher education have been introduced. In the materials we reviewed, the time span of development and approval of documents on the organization of SIQA by HEIs is represented by the period from 2019 till present days.

At the same time, it should be noted that the quality management system, developed in accordance with the requirements of international standard ISO 9001, has been implemented and maintained in working condition since 2013 in the universities of Kazakhstan.

As noted, the quality assurance policy aims to "...make a worthy contribution to the formation of human capital for the innovative transformation of the region and the country" (Zhubanov University, 2020).

SIQA is defined as "a set of university organizational structure, internal documentation, indicators, processes and resources necessary for continuous improvement of the quality of education, and the development of a culture of quality" (Astana IT University 2022, 2019).

The place of SIQA in the system of strategic priorities of HEIs is determined by their interrelation and interaction. SIQA is a tool aimed at achieving the strategic goals of HEIs. It can be considered as one of the key elements that ensure the fulfillment of strategic priorities, such as improving the quality of education and research, improving reputation and so on. Thus, the quality system plays a role in the realization of strategic goals and priorities of the HEI (Table 1).

**Table 1**

*The place of SIQA in the system of strategic priorities of HEIs*

№	Position	Name of OHPGE
1.	IQAS is a part of strategic management. It is considered together with the mission, Strategic Development Plan, Academic Policy " (Astana IT University 2022, 2019).	Astana IT University
2.	IQAS – the first element of the three-dimensional model of internal quality assurance; the second - external quality assurance system; the third - mechanisms of management and regulation of the quality assurance system (Abai University, 2023).	Abay University
3.	SIQA reflects common approaches, policies, principles, standards and basic mechanisms for improving the quality of education and developing a culture of continuous quality improvement" (Buketov Karaganda University, 2021a, 2021b).	Karaganda Buketov University

In general, it is stated that "the IQA system reflects common approaches, policies, key principles for improving the quality of education ... and developing a culture of continuous quality improvement" (Astana IT University, 2019).

The purpose of the SIQA is key to its effectiveness and success because, firstly, they guide the direction of efforts and resources in achieving educational quality, allowing efforts and resources to be properly channelled and focussed on achieving certain goals; secondly, they serve as a measure of the success of the quality assurance system and provide a basic framework for assessing the effectiveness of current practices and processes, allowing universities to determine how well they are fulfilling their objectives; thirdly, they are an important tool for ensuring transparency and clear communication between the university and its stakeholders.

Thus, the Quality Policy of Karaganda University sees the purpose of SIQA as follows:

- "defines the general structure of the University's internal quality assurance system;
- contributes to ensuring and improving the quality of education;
- supports mutual trust, and promotes the recognition of learning outcomes and learner mobility beyond the national education system;
- provides information on quality assurance to the educational space of Kazakhstan and the European Higher Education Area" (Buketov Karaganda University, 2021a).

The next important element of the methodology of building a SIQA by HEIs are the principles that allow to ensure efficiency, consistency and sustainability of the designed systems.

We see the relevance of formulating principles for the organization of the SIQA for the following reasons: firstly, principles become the main reference points that define the goals and objectives of the SIQA. The principles help HEIs to focus their efforts on achieving key objectives; secondly, the principles help to create a set of rules that promote the consistency of practices of all participants in the processes; thirdly, the principles are the basis for transparency and openness of the SIQA, allowing stakeholders to understand what values and objectives underlie the HEI's activities in the field of education quality assurance.

Thus, HEIs organize and manage SIQA on the basis of the following quality assurance principles (Table 2):

**Table 2**  
*Principles of quality assurance*

Karaganda BU	Astana IT University	M. Kozybaev North Kazakhstan University
<p>1) the University's activities comply with legislative and regulatory requirements in the field of education, ESG recommendations;</p> <p>2) ensuring and improving the quality of applied to all educational programmes implemented by the University;</p> <p>3) the University management ensures unity of strategy, policy and procedures; involvement of all employees and students, external stakeholders in quality assurance activities;</p> <p>4) SIQA ensures equality of opportunity and fairness to learners;</p> <p>5) quality assurance promotes academic integrity and academic freedom, the principle of zero tolerance to any form of corruption and discrimination;</p> <p>6) quality assurance provides for a clear division of authority and responsibility for processes, quality and standards;</p> <p>7) quality assurance is based on a process approach and compliance and risk orientated thinking;</p> <p>8) SIQA ensures that important management decisions are made based on comprehensive analysis of data and information;</p> <p>9) the University management creates conditions for continuous improvement of the quality assurance system and development of quality culture;</p> <p>10) for continuous improvement of the quality assurance system, external and internal quality assessment and regular review of the quality assurance policy and standards are applied;</p> <p>11) SIQA is transparent and accessible to stakeholders.</p>	<p>1) quality assurance corresponds to the diversity of higher education systems and learners;</p> <p>2) compliance of the university's activities with legislative and regulatory requirements, ESG recommendations;</p> <p>3) quality assurance applies to all educational programmes implemented by the university;</p> <p>4) the leading role of the university is to ensure the unity of strategy, policy and procedures, involvement of all employees and students in the activities to ensure the quality of education;</p> <p>5) taking into account the needs and expectations of external and internal stakeholders, their active involvement in activities to ensure the quality of education;</p> <p>6) ensuring equality of opportunity and fairness to learners;</p> <p>7) promoting academic honesty and academic freedom, intolerance to any form of corruption and discrimination;</p> <p>8) Clear division of responsibility and authority for processes, quality and standards;</p> <p>9) applying a process approach and compliance and risk orientated thinking;</p> <p>10) making important management decisions based on comprehensive analyses of data and information;</p> <p>11) creating conditions for continuous improvement of the quality assurance system and development of quality culture;</p> <p>12) applying external and internal quality assessment;</p> <p>13) ensuring regular review of quality assurance policies and standards;</p> <p>14) ensuring transparency and accessibility of information for stakeholders</p>	<p>1) quality assurance corresponds to the diversity of higher education systems, institutions, educational programmes and learners;</p> <p>2) compliance of activities with regulatory and legislative requirements, ESG recommendations;</p> <p>3) the leading role of the University management is to ensure the unity of strategy, policies and procedures, involvement of all staff in quality assurance and improvement activities, providing the necessary resources;</p> <p>4) taking into account the needs and expectations of external and internal stakeholders, their active involvement in the activities to ensure and improve the quality of education;</p> <p>5) ensuring equality of opportunity and fairness to students;</p> <p>6) maintaining academic honesty and freedom, intolerance to any forms of corruption and discrimination.</p> <p>7) clearly defining responsibility for processes, quality and standards;</p> <p>8) applying the process approach and principles of risk-based thinking;</p> <p>9) making important management decisions based on comprehensive analyses of data and information;</p> <p>10) creation of conditions for continuous improvement of the quality assurance system and development of quality culture;</p> <p>11) applying external and internal independent control;</p> <p>12) ensuring regular review of quality assurance policies and standards;</p> <p>13) ensuring transparency and accessibility of information for stakeholders.</p>

The organization of HEIs' SIQA relies on the so-called "elements", which in their totality ensure the quality of educational services provided by the organizations (Table 3).

**Table 3**  
*Elements of HEIs' SIQA*

№	Elements of HEIs' SIQA are ...	Name of OHPGE
1.	... interrelated and interacting quality management policies, standards, tools and methods (Astana IT University, 2019).	Astana IT University
2.	... various elements of educational quality management such as policies, standards, tools and methods, and involves their interaction to ensure quality assurance (Abai University, 2023).	Abay University
3.	... internal quality assurance policies and standards (M. Kozybaev North Kazakhstan University, 2022).	M. Kozybaev North Kazakhstan University
4.	... set of interrelated and interacting Policies, standards, tools and ways of managing the quality of education (Korkyt Ata Kyzylorda University, 2023a, 2023b).	Korkyt Ata Kyzylorda University

Thus, the fundamental elements of the SIQA are the Policy and Standards of internal quality assurance. As noted in the materials of the "Astana IT University" SIQA organization, "the quality assurance policy is aimed at maintaining high quality standards of educational services of the university, as well as to ensure the link between teaching, research and innovation. The tool for realization of the Quality Assurance Policy is the culture of quality.

Internal quality assurance standards establish a set of requirements for the University to ensure high quality of activities based on uniform procedures" (Astana IT University, 2019).

The Quality Assurance Policy and Internal Quality Assurance Standards as the main elements of the methodology of the SIQA organization are based on international standards and guidelines for quality assurance in higher and postgraduate education in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), "taking into account national priorities, specificities and challenges addressed by the higher education system" (Abai University, 2023).

The SIQA is aligned by HEIs to the ten Standards:

- S1. Quality Assurance Policy
- S2. Programme development and approval
- S3. Student-centered learning, teaching and assessment
- S4. Learner enrolment, performance, recognition and certification
- S5. Teaching staff
- S6. Learning resources and learner support systems
- S7. Information management
- S8. Public information
- S9. Ongoing monitoring and periodic programme evaluation
- S10. Periodic external quality assurance.

Each of the Standards listed above is described in a number of documents (Table 4):

**Table 4***Documents ensuring the implementation of the Standards*

The document	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10
ESG	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Model rules for the operation of educational organizations of the relevant types	+		+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Internal documents of OHPGE that ensure the implementation of the standard	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
SCES of higher education of the Republic of Kazakhstan		+								
National Qualifications Framework of the Republic of Kazakhstan		+								
Rules for organizing the educational process using credit-based learning technology (CBLT)			+	+		+	+			
Model rules for admission to training in educational organizations implementing educational programmes of higher and postgraduate education				+						
Qualification requirements for educational activities and the list of documents confirming compliance with them					+					

Distinguishing the common and specific in the list of documents defining HEIs' SIQA, we note the possibility of variability in the development of internal documents by organizations to ensure the implementation of each of the 10 standards (Table 5). Internal documents ensure the purposeful solution of management tasks within OHPGE, acting as regulators of HEIs' internal life on a par with legislative and legal acts, at the same time not contradicting them. This activity contributes to the implementation of HEIs' academic freedom policy.

**Table 5***Internal documents of HEIs on the implementation of the Standards (HEIs practice)*

Standard	List of internal documents of the OHPGE (Omirbaev and Mukhataev, 2023)
S1	Strategy (Plan) of OHPGE development; Documented procedures of OHPGE internal quality assurance system; Academic policy of OHPGE, etc.
S2	Academic policy. Rules for the development of educational programmes of higher and postgraduate education, etc.
S3	Strategy of OHPGE development; Academic Policy; Rules for the organization of the educational process on credit-based learning technology of education; Regulations on Student Self-Governance; Rules of Academic Integrity; Code of Honour of Students; Regulations on Editorship, etc.
S4	Strategy of OHPGE development; Rules for the admission of OHPGE; Rules for the organization of the educational process on credit-based learning technology of OHPGE; Rules for the organization and conduct of interim attestation of students of OHPGE; Rules for the conduct of final attestation of students of OHPGE; Regulations on the system of evaluation of students; Regulations on the verification of written works for plagiarism of OHPGE; Rules for the recognition of learning outcomes of formal and non-formal education, etc.
S5	Strategy of OHPGE development; Academic policy; Personnel policy; Rules of competitive recruitment of teaching staff; Regulations on key performance indicators (KPI) of teaching staff and employees; Regulations on research work; Regulations on granting internal research grants; Regulations on the intra-university stage of the "Best Teacher" competition; Regulations on attracting foreign specialists for teaching, research activities and top management; Regulations on academic mobility; Regulations on the provision of editorship, etc.
S6	Strategy of OHPGE development, Academic policy, Rules for the organization of the educational process on credit-based learning technology of education, Rules for the use of the



	scientific library, Rules for work in the electronic library, Rules for the organization of educational and methodical activities, Regulations for the organization of preparatory educational courses, etc.
S7	Strategy of OHPGE development; Information Policy; Rules for the organization of the educational process using credit-based learning technology; Regulations on Document Management, etc.
S8	Strategy of OHPGE development; Information Policy; Rules for the organization of the educational process on credit-based learning technology of education, Regulations on the document management of OHPGE, etc.
S9	Strategy (Plan) of OHPGE development; Academic policy; Regulations on Academic Committees; Regulations on the Creation and Quality Assessment of Online Courses; Regulations on the Organization of Teaching and Methodological Activities Regulations on the Development of OHPGE Programmes, etc.
S10	Strategy of OHPGE development; Academic policy; International co-operation (documented procedures), etc.

### **Conclusions**

The study has demonstrated that the regulatory and organizational conditions are currently in place at the national level for the implementation of academic freedom policies in OHPGE and the development of strategies and activities to ensure the quality of higher education. One of the resources for solving this problem is the creation of synergetic and harmonious internal quality assurance systems as a component of NQAS.

The research has shown that the design practice of SIQA of domestic HEIs is based on the methodology of organization of complex systems with the definition of their purpose, objectives, principles and structure taking into account international Standards and Recommendations.

The conducted research on the practice of organization of internal quality assurance systems by higher education institutions of Kazakhstan allows us to see the trajectories of filling the content of the management of the processes of improving educational services, identifying the target and substantive bases of changes in higher education institutions. This indicates the prospect of stimulating the development of new aspects and approaches in the methodology of quality assurance in higher education.

It is obvious that within the framework of re-engineering of the national system of quality assurance in higher education, it is relevant to conduct further research into the organization of HEIs' internal quality assurance systems, which will make it possible to achieve comparability and harmonization in their design and, as a consequence, to improve the efficiency of the educational process, research and innovation in OHPGE.

We believe it is important to note that further discussion and research on the organisation of HEIs' SIQA can contribute to the formation of a quality culture in OHPGE and the development of a scientific community in the field of education quality assurance. This may include publications, conferences, seminars and other forms of knowledge and research exchange. Also, it seems promising to conduct research on the selection of training content for specialists responsible for the design and support of SIQA, on the development of tools for building monitoring systems for continuous control and timely adjustments to internal quality assurance systems, if necessary.

These measures will ultimately contribute to increasing the competitiveness of domestic universities in the international arena as well.

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