

# Ensuring the Quality of Higher Education in Ukraine

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## Summary

The National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education plays a crucial role in education in Ukraine, as an independent entity creates and ensures quality standards of higher education, which allow to properly implement the educational policy of the state, develop the economy and society as a whole. The purpose of the article: to reveal the crucial role of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education to create quality management of higher education institutions, to show its mechanism as an independent entity that creates and ensures quality standards of higher education. and society as a whole. The mission of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education is to become a catalyst for positive changes in higher education and the formation of a culture of its quality. The strategic goals of the National Agency are implemented in three main areas: the quality of educational services, recognition of the quality of scientific results, ensuring the systemic impact of the National Agency. The National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education exercises various powers, which can be divided into: regulatory, analytical, accreditation, control, communication. The effectiveness of the work of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education for 2020 has been proved. The results of a survey conducted by 183 higher education institutions of Ukraine conducted by the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education are shown. Emphasis was placed on the development of "Recommendations of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education regarding the introduction of an internal quality assurance system." The international activity and international recognition of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education are shown.

## Keywords:

*quality, higher education, National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, positive changes in higher education, culture of organization, higher education institutions.*

## 1. Introduction

Ensuring the quality of higher education is a requirement of modernity, a key principle of the Bologna Declaration and an indisputable priority for the academic community and public educational policy of Europe and other developed countries. Unfortunately, Ukraine is not a leader in ensuring the quality of higher education, the country shows academic dishonesty, poor quality educational services by some educational institutions, lack of interaction and trust between stakeholders [6].

Given that state and public control over higher education is an integral part of the mechanism of legal regulation of higher education, the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education plays a crucial role, as an independent entity creates and ensures higher quality standards of higher education. to implement the educational policy of the state, to develop the economy and society in general [8].

The driving force behind the quality assurance of higher education in Ukraine is the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education which was established on April 15, 2015 (Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2015), which is an independent permanent collegial body and the establishment of which is provided by the Law of Ukraine "On Higher Education" of 2014.

The first member of the National Agency for Ukraine [6] was elected in 2015, but for a number of reasons it never started. In 2018, the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education was "reset" - the Law of Ukraine "On

Education" in 2017 changed the principles of election of members of the Agency. In February 2019, the leadership of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education was elected and approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. At the end of February 2019, the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education officially launched its activities, elected the Head of the Secretariat and began selecting and appointing its staff.

To date, more than 3,000 people are involved in the system of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (21 members of the National Agency, 58 employees of the Secretariat, 35 trainers, 329 members of GER, 2528 experts in evaluating educational programs). All these people declared their desire to ensure the quality of higher education in Ukraine, to carry out external evaluation of educational programs in accordance with the new philosophy of accreditation, based on the value approach and European standards ESG-2015.

The activities of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education are provided by the Secretariat. As of the end of 2020, the Secretariat of the National Agency employed 59 people, with a maximum of 61 staff members.

The mission of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education is to become a catalyst for positive changes in higher education and the formation of a culture of its quality.

The strategic goals of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education are implemented in three main areas:

#### 1. Quality of educational services

- guaranteeing the quality of educational programs through the introduction of an effective procedure for their accreditation and demanding attitude to the procedures of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and the activities of higher education institutions;
- promoting the functioning of internal quality assurance systems in higher education institutions through the implementation of advisory and information activities and benchmarking of local quality systems;
- harmonization of standards and development of criteria for ensuring the quality of higher education based on best international and national practices.

#### 2. Recognition of the quality of scientific results

- formation of a policy of integrity of scientific research through the introduction of transparent and effective procedures, intolerance to the manifestations of pseudoscience;
- introduction of procedures for certification of scientific personnel that meet the best European standards;
- accreditation of specialized scientific councils on the basis of the developed regulation and monitoring of their activity.

#### 3. Ensuring the systemic impact of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

- monitoring and analysis of the results of the activities of higher education institutions to ensure the quality of education through accreditation procedures and certification of scientific personnel;
- promoting the integration of Ukraine's higher education system into the world educational and scientific space by establishing partnerships with foreign quality assurance agencies, encouraging higher education institutions to cooperate internationally and recognizing educational and scientific degrees obtained in foreign higher education institutions;
- ensuring effective cooperation in the field of quality assurance in higher education among all stakeholders through mutual respect in relations, restoration of trust, ensuring openness in communication;
- stimulating the participation of Ukrainian higher education institutions in international educational and scientific rankings based on the introduction of new qualitative criteria;
- use of the best world practices in respect of the national educational tradition;
- building one's own positive reputation through the trust of participants in the educational process and stakeholders in the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education [6].

**The purpose of the article:** to reveal the crucial role of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education for quality management of higher education institutions, to show its mechanism as an independent entity that creates and ensures quality standards of higher education. society as a whole.

**The hypothesis of the study** is that the activities of higher education institutions will improve under the control of the independent National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, which is the driving force behind quality assurance in higher education in Ukraine.

## 2. Analysis of recent research and publications

The article "Higher education and academic integrity are problems of combination" deals with the normative regulation of the relatively new for Ukraine concept of "academic plagiarism". The norms of the legislation related to the establishment of the concept of academic integrity, types of violations of academic integrity, procedures for consideration of possible violations of academic integrity, types of liability for violations of academic integrity and bodies entitled to apply them are analyzed. Particular attention is paid to the issue of establishing the fact of academic plagiarism and its differences from plagiarism. Proposals to the current legislation are formulated in order

to optimize the legal regulation of the issue of academic integrity [7].

I. Sokolova in the article analyzes the national context of higher education reforms in Southern Europe, based on broad source analysis. The author has found out that the countries of Southern Europe (Spain, Italy, Portugal, and Greece) are distinguished by the national peculiarities of institutional transformations in the field of higher education, demonstrate the experience of successful implementation of the EHEA educational policy, taking into account the national priorities and historical traditions of higher education. A qualitative approach was applied when judging the level of involvement in quality assurance (QA) agencies in Eastern Europe. To implement the national Laws on Higher Education, harmonized with «Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA», agencies & HEIs in Spain, Italy, Portugal and Greece emphasize quality assurance procedures focused on learning, teaching, and research output. The general and specific procedures of external and internal quality assurance in the countries of Southern Europe have been described. From the material presented in this paper, the following theme may require further attention: examining quality frameworks and quality assurance standards in Eastern Europe [11].

A. Polovchenya describes the administrative and legal status of the National agency for quality assurance in higher education. It is disclosed that the National agency for quality assurance in higher education has a general administrative and legal status as an independent subject in public relations between higher education institutions and the state regarding the quality of higher education and the implementation of educational policy of the state. It is proved that state and public control over higher education is an integral part of the mechanism of legal regulation of higher education, therefore, the National agency for quality assurance in higher education plays a decisive role, since as an independent entity creates and ensures higher education quality standards that allow for proper to implement the educational policy of the state, to develop the economy and society as a whole. It is thoroughly proved that the administrative and legal status of National agency for quality assurance in higher education consists in the fact that the agency is an independent subject of higher education management that performs regulatory, controlling, accreditation, analytical, communicative and other powers in the field of higher education, which make it possible to create and ensure higher quality standards of quality, to implement the educational policy of the state properly, to develop the economy and to educate society as a whole [8].

R. Mishra discusses about the usage of data analytics and artificial intelligence in ensuring quality assurance at higher education institutions (HEI's). In increasingly competitive environment in higher education especially

among private higher education institutions, quality assurance has become the differentiating factor. Students and their parents are concerned about both internal and external quality of the college/university which they consider for enrolling. Increasing number of students enrolling for higher education, international presence of universities through branch campus and franchising model of operations, increased awareness about international accreditations and rankings has been the driving forces behind the transformation of quality assurance systems and procedures in the higher education institutions. Information systems is the key component of quality assurance which lead to higher student satisfaction and further business growth for higher education institution. Using artificial intelligence and data analytics, HEI's can ensure compliance, internal quality of the educational programmes, increase in students' satisfaction etc [5].

The article "Modern demands of education quality management in a higher education institution" is devoted to the analysis of modern demands of education quality management in the conditions of higher education institution operation. The methodological basis of the study is the concept of management, based on a system of philosophical and general scientific doctrines about the quality of education and its specifics in higher education, the concept of personality-oriented learning, systems theory, modeling and development. The authors systematized methodological approaches to modeling the quality management system of education in higher education. The study developed a model of quality management, which is presented at the levels of: subsystems of management approaches, theoretical and methodological foundations, the value of the components and factors of education of different nature; defined a system of principles of internal quality management of higher education, aimed at performing a regulatory function at the general scientific, strategic, practice-oriented, technical, specific scientific and factor levels; an algorithm for building an education quality management system in a higher education institution is presented. It is shown that the quality management of education should be carried out at levels that ensure the manufacturability of the process, the possibility of its improvement with further analysis of the results and the adoption of appropriate management decisions [2].

Liu, Y., Yin, L., & Guo, J. lights up policymakers and the public are increasingly concerned about overeducation, and how it relates to the investment of resources in higher education. This study uses Chinese data to explore the determinants of overeducation and wage effects of overeducation at different levels of quality in higher education. Empirical results suggest two factors that significantly influence the incidence of overeducation among graduating students: the practicality of curriculum and student rule-based input. Results from wage equation suggest that overeducated individuals with lower quality of

higher education incur greater wage penalties. This study can inform the Chinese government's allocation of financial investments in higher education [4].

Easley, Strawderman, Babski-Reeves, Bullington, & Smith describes the quality factors in higher education. Upper administrators from public four-year higher education institutions in the United States were surveyed regarding their perceptions of factors they considered most important when assessing quality in the higher education institution. Respondents rated graduation and retention as the most important indicator of quality. Survey results were further compared to methodologies of the US News and World Report rankings, Times Higher Education World University Rankings and Quacquarelli Symonds World University Rankings and found that the perceived quality factors identified by survey respondents did not align with methodologies for any of these three rankings [3].

### 3. Research methods

183 higher education institutions took part in the survey (124 in the 2017 survey). The composition of higher education institutions that took part in the survey looks like this. (see Fig. 1).

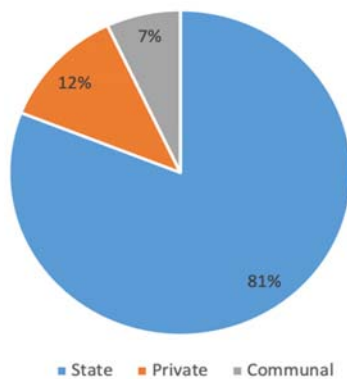


Fig. 1. Distribution of higher education institutions of the participants in the survey by form of ownership.

The form of ownership is dominated by public higher education institutions (81%), but it was better to present institutions of communal (7%) and private (12%) forms of ownership, which allows us to speak of a higher level of representativeness of the results.

According to the territorial location, all regions of Ukraine were relatively evenly represented in the survey (see Fig. 2.)

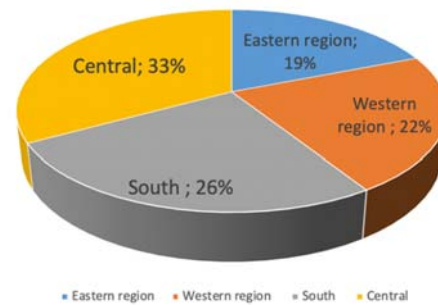


Fig. 2. Distribution of higher education institutions of respondents by macro-regions

Compared to the 2017 Survey, the representation of institutions in the Eastern region decreased slightly, while the share of higher education institutions in the Central region increased. The share of Kyiv universities increased significantly (18% compared to 11% in the 2017 Survey) [1].

### 4. Results

The work of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education is effective. In 2020, 53 trainings were conducted with pre-selected candidates - 13 trainings in face-to-face format, 40 in distance learning. The total number of participants in the trainings was 1477 people. Each training was conducted by two certified trainers trained by the British Accreditation Agency QAA and the National Agency. The Department of Experts of the Secretariat provided organizational support for each training.

During the year, the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education also introduced a number of tools (and accompanying explanations) that promote transparency in the accreditation process at each stage. In particular, a public portal was published with detailed coverage of the status of each accreditation case.

Especially relevant in 2020 were online webinars, which became the only means of mass communication in the context of the coronavirus pandemic: 6 webinars were organized by the National Agency, which were viewed by more than 52.2 thousand listeners; three GER webinars with a total of more than 11.75 thousand views; 10 online events called "School of Quality" with the participation of invited guests from higher education institutions, which were attended by 50.3 thousand people. Each meeting of the National Agency is broadcast on the Agency's Facebook page. Such public activities of the National Agency reached an audience of over 155.5 thousand people.

The activity of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education is presented in Table 1.

TABLE I: ACTIVITY OF THE NATIONAL AGENCY ON THE INTERNET

Genres	Number of events	Audience covered (thousands of people)	Views (thousands of times)
School of Quality of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education	10	200,1	50,3
# comments	35	512,3	21,3
# prompts	41	373,4	16,0
# advises	19	157,9	7,7
# informs	33	286,3	10,1
Broadcasts of members of the national agency	6	95,2	52,2
Webinars of the branch expert council	3	91,7	11,75
Broadcast of meetings	8	155,5	29,3

The National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education conducted a survey in which 183 higher education institutions participated. According to the self-assessments of Higher Education Institutions, the vast majority of them believed that they had a system of internal quality assurance of education - 125 (68.3%) out of 183 stated its existence, and 58 (31.7%) stated the presence of some elements (see Fig.3)

Existence of internal quality assurance system in HEI:

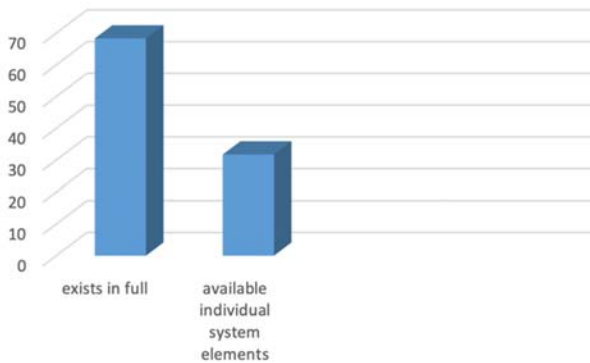


Fig. 3. The presence of an internal quality assurance system in HEI.

Unlike the 2017 survey conducted by the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, no institution reported that it did not have such a system or some of its elements. This was influenced by the launch of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

Analysis of the results of the survey confirmed that all participants share the view that building an internal quality assurance system is impossible without creating a set of documents that define the vision, goals, content, procedures,

etc. quality assurance within the institution. However, the majority prefers the development of an integrated document (79.8% of institutions), which regulates the relevant processes, and this distribution is also fair in terms of institutions by form of ownership and training. Compared to the results of the 2017 survey, this indicator shows a significant increase (then it was 66%), we can talk about a certain trend.

It is interesting to compare the answers to this question and the question of the existence of an internal quality assurance system in the institution. Thus, 111 institutions (60.7% of the total number of survey participants) declared the existence of an integrated document and an integrated system; at the same time, the presence of such a document in the absence of an integrated system takes place in 35 institutions (19.1%).

Instead, in the absence of an integrated document, 14 institutions (7.7%) declared the existence of the system. The situation when both the integral system and the integrated document are missing is recorded in 23 institutions (12.6%).

The attempt of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education to find out when the problem of quality assurance is in the focus of attention of the management of domestic Higher Education Institutions is significant. According to the survey results, we can distinguish three periods of formation of local quality management systems. In the first period - up to 2000 inclusive - such systems were implemented only by individual enthusiastic institutions that are able to understand their systemic impact on the progress of the institutions themselves (this answer was given by 6 HEI). The second period covers the years 2001–2014, when the range of such institutions increased somewhat under the influence of Ukraine's accession to the Bologna Process (56 institutions witnessed the start of relevant work during this period). The process of quality assurance became comprehensive after the adoption in 2014 of the Law of Ukraine "On Higher Education", one of the main objectives of which was to create local quality management systems. As a result, in the following years (2015–2019) such systems, in one form or another, began to appear in dozens of institutions (this answer was given by 107 higher education institutions, that participated in the survey).

Start working in a higher education institution to create a system internal quality assurance:

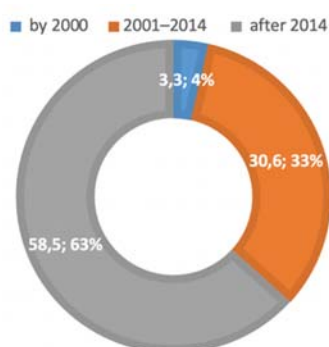


Fig. 4 Getting started in a higher education institution to create a system internal quality assurance.

## 5. Discussion of results

The internal (intra-university) quality assurance system of higher education aims to create an algorithm for continuous institutional attention to the quality of education, including the revision and improvement of training courses and educational programs. The National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education has developed "Recommendations of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education regarding the introduction of an internal quality assurance system" (2019).

During the training of experts of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, which accredit educational programs, their attention is paid to the procedure and procedure for verifying information on compliance with standards of academic integrity within a particular institution of higher education (scientific institution). For example, in confirming information from a higher education institution (academic institution) that academic integrity is part of their internal quality assurance system, it is necessary to state the presence of at least the following elements: 1) policies, standards and procedures for academic integrity should be predetermined, clear and understandable, have the form of a Code of Honor or other document in accordance with the decision of the institution of higher education. Procedures should include both mechanisms for monitoring academic integrity (verification of written work for text and other borrowings without correct references, peer review of scientific texts before publication, anonymous survey of higher education students on the presence / absence of academic integrity violations, etc.) and effective, clear and transparent procedures for responding to such violations and bringing to academic responsibility; 2) institutional support for the observance of academic integrity involves the existence of a separate structural unit (official) that (which) takes care of academic integrity, or a clear division of relevant functions

and powers between existing structural units (officials) of higher education; 3) there are appropriate information and technological tools used by the institution of higher education in order to prevent and counteract the manifestations of academic dishonesty; 4) measures to promote academic integrity among higher education seekers may include, for example, the introduction into the educational program of certain educational components on academic integrity and academic writing skills, the implementation of higher education institutions of certain short-term training modules on this topic, etc.; 5) declaring and maintaining a policy of "zero tolerance" for any manifestations of violations of academic integrity, embodied in the institutional culture and supported by appropriate procedures and institutional practices [7].

In July 2020, the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education became a full member of the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA). During the voting, all CEENQA members unanimously supported the National Agency and praised its achievements and results in just one year of existence. CEENQA brings together 40 organizations from 26 countries and aims to work with member organizations to develop and harmonize their quality assurance activities in Central and Eastern Europe, thus contributing to the development of the European Higher Education Area.

In addition, the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education is actively developing a network of foreign contacts with experts and organizations of academic integrity. Thus, in July 2020, the National Agency became a member of the International Center for Academic Integrity (ICAI), which was established to combat fraud, plagiarism and academic dishonesty in higher education [1].

## Conclusions

The National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education plays a crucial role in ensuring quality higher education. The strategic goals of the National Agency are implemented in three main areas: the quality of educational services, recognition of the quality of scientific results, ensuring the systemic impact of the National Agency. The achievement of these goals is through the implementation of the values of internal culture of the organization determined by the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. These values are: partnership, innovation, responsibility, integrity, openness, transparency, independence, credibility, professionalism, demanding, trust.

The National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education exercises various powers, which can be divided

into: regulatory, analytical, accreditation, control, communication.

We proved the effectiveness of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in 2020, showed the results of a survey conducted by 183 institutions of higher education in Ukraine, conducted by the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, emphasized the development of "Recommendations education in relation to the introduction of an internal quality assurance system ", shows the international activities and international recognition of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

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