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Analysis of the findings of institutional, programme and initial programme accreditation (2024-2025)

Compiled by:

G.T. Zhumadilova,
Candidate of Chemical Sciences

Astana, 2026

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

In the context of the transformation of the higher education system, increasing competition among higher education institutions and strengthened requirements for quality assurance of educational provision, independent external review of educational programmes is one of the key instruments for ensuring and enhancing the quality of higher education.

This analysis is based on the reports of external expert panels (EEPs) following institutional, programme and initial programme accreditation conducted in 2024 and 2025. The purpose of the analysis is to identify key trends in the implementation of institutional and programme accreditation standards, as well as to determine the typical remarks and recommendations made by external expert panels. Particular attention is paid to the comparison of institutional and programme accreditation findings, which made it possible to assess the degree of consistency between the quality assurance mechanisms declared at the institutional level and their actual implementation at the level of educational programmes.

Special emphasis is placed on initial educational programmes, as at the stage of design and launch is critical, since regulatory, methodological and organisational support significantly influence the effectiveness of the educational programme.

An important component of the review is the analysis of stakeholder engagement – including students, academic staff, employers, and graduates – from the perspective of their actual impact on the content of educational programmes.

The findings of the analysis are intended for practical use by higher education institutions: in the development of educational programmes, the improvement of internal quality assurance systems, and preparation for external review procedures.

1. ANALYTICAL PART

1.1. Overview of accredited educational programmes

Within the framework of this study, reports of external expert panels (EEPs) on the findings of institutional and programme accreditation conducted in 2024–2025 were analysed. The analysis covers educational programmes at all levels of higher and postgraduate education: Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral programmes.

Figure 1 presents the distribution of educational programmes by level of education. Bachelor's programmes constitute the largest share, while Master's and Doctoral programmes account for a smaller proportion but play a key role in the development of research capacity.

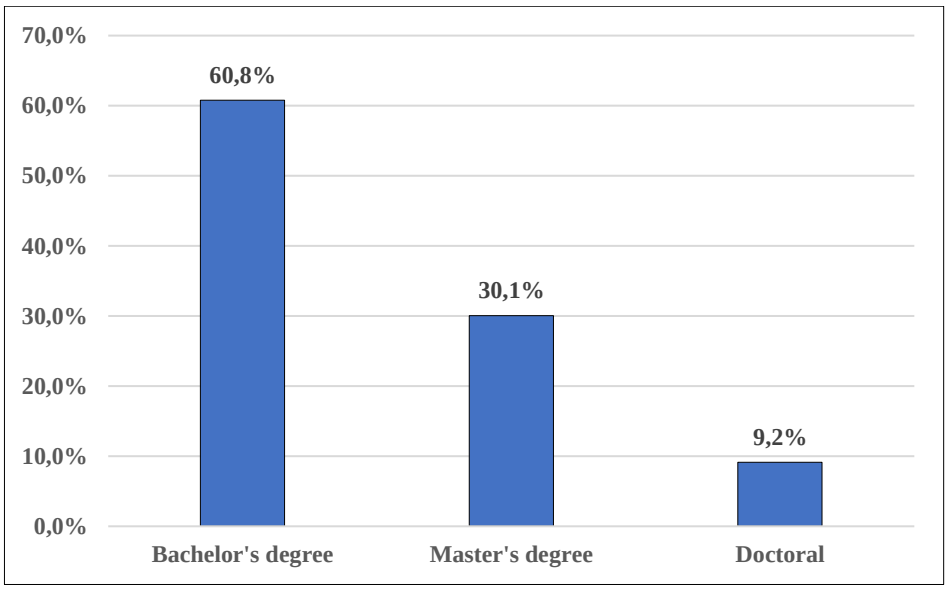

Figure 1. Structure of accredited educational programmes by level of education

To ensure the comparability of findings, a targeted sample of external review reports was formed, including higher education institutions that underwent both institutional and programme accreditation (Appendix). This made it possible to conduct a comparative analysis of external review findings at different levels of governance.

The sample also includes reports on initial educational programmes in order to identify specific features of design and implementation of new educational programmes, as well as to assess the readiness of higher education institutions to ensure quality at the stage of programme launch.

Initial educational programmes are defined as programmes undergoing accreditation for the first time, whereas continuing educational programmes are programmes previously accredited and are currently in the stage of implementation and development.

The presented overview provides an analytical basis for identifying systemic issues, that are subsequently examined both at the level of established educational programmes and at the stage of launching new programmes.

Figure 2 presents the distribution of accredited higher education institutions and educational programmes across the regions of Kazakhstan. The data demonstrate a broad geographical coverage of external review procedures, which allows the identified trends to be considered representative of the national higher education system.

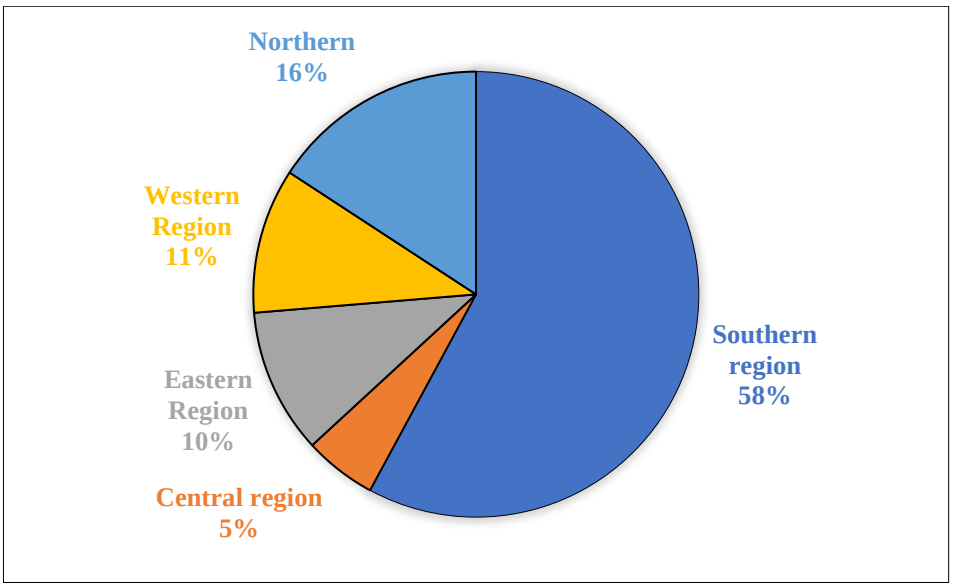

Figure 2. Distribution of accredited higher education institutions and educational programmes by region in Kazakhstan

1.2. Comparative analysis of programme and institutional accreditation

A comparative analysis of the findings of institutional and programme accreditation was conducted using a correspondence matrix (Table 1). The comparison was initially carried out for each higher education institution separately across key quality assurance standards and subsequently aggregated to produce an overall analysis.

The matrix presents levels of compliance with accreditation standards and criteria based on the findings of external reviews, allowing assessment of the consistency between institutionally declared quality assurance mechanisms and their practical implementation at the level of educational programmes, as well as identification of both areas of consistent compliance and problematic areas.

The findings show that institutional accreditation in most higher education institutions demonstrates higher and more stable levels of compliance with accreditation standards and criteria. At the same time, programme accreditation reveals shortcomings in the implementation of these standards at the level of individual educational programmes.

The observed gap indicates that, institutional policies and regulations in the field of quality assurance are generally established; however, their practical implementation at programme level is uneven. Programme accreditation demonstrates greater differentiation and identifies more areas requiring improvement, which indicates variations in the quality of implementation of specific educational programmes.

The matrix also shows that the least stable standard at institutional level is *Public Information*, indicating systemic shortcomings in the management of transparency and timely updating of published information.

At the level of educational programmes, the highest concentration of remarks was recorded in three standards:

- Academic staff;
- Student admission, progression, recognition and certification;
- Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment.

Further analysis of the external expert panel reports allowed grouping typical remarks for each of the above standards.

Policy for Quality Assurance

External expert panels identified the following key shortcomings under this standard, indicating insufficient staff engagement in the implementation of the quality assurance policy:

- Lack of a clear understanding of the mission and quality assurance policy among some representatives of the institution;
- Inadequate documentation of human resources and teaching and methodological materials.

Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

Analysis of external expert panel reports identified the following remarks which reveal a gap in the actual implementation of student-centred learning principles:

- Lack of clear differentiation of assessment criteria reflecting course content, intended learning outcomes and competencies;
- Lack of a transparent and regulated system for assessing final theses/projects;
- Lack of or limited academic mobility and research activity of students, including participation in academic conferences and competitions;
- Weak software and methodological support for students' teaching practice components;
- Insufficient involvement of industry representatives and employers in the educational process;
- Absence of a regulatory framework for dual education;
- Limited genuine choice of elective courses, including minor programmes.

Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

The following issues are most frequently identified under this standard:

- Low proportion of international students;
- Lack of a systematic approach to student recruitment;
- Low student enrolment numbers in certain educational programmes;
- Low graduate employment rates;
- Lack of evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of career guidance activities.

These remarks indicate insufficient competitiveness of certain educational programmes and the need to reconsider positioning and promotion strategies.

Table 1. Matrix of compliance with institutional and programme accreditation of higher education institutions

Standard	HEI 1	HEI 2	HEI 3	HEI 4	University 5	University 6	University 7	University 8	University 9
Policy for quality assurance	IA: PS PA: PS	IA: PS PA: PS	IA: ZS PA: PS	IA: PS PA: PS	IA: PS PA: 13 - PS, 1 -ZS	IA: ZS PA: PS	IA: PS PA: PS	IA: PS PA: PS	IA: PS PA: PS
Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment	IA: SC PA: SC	IA: PS PA: 19-PS, 6-ZS, 1CHS	IA: ZS PA: 20-PS, 2-ZS	IA: PS PA: 8 -PS, 9 -ZS, 1 - CHS	IA: PS PA: 12 -PS, 2 -ZS	IA: ZS PA: 18 -PS, 11 -ZS	IA: PS PA: 2-PS, 2-CHS	IA: PS PA: 8-PS, 1 -ZS	IA: PS PA: 9-PS, 2-ZS
Student admission, progression (academic performance), recognition and certification	IA: PS PA: PS	IA: PS PA: 19-PS, 7-ZS	IA: PS PA: PS	IA: PS PA: 8 - PS, 8 -ZS, 2 - CHS	IA: PS PA: 13-PS, 1-ZS	IA: ZS PA: 14-PS, 15-ZS	IA: PS PA: PS	IA: PS PA: 5-PS, 4-ZS	IA: PS PA: 4-PS, 7-ZS
Educational programmes: design, effectiveness, continuous monitoring	IA: ZS PA: ZS	IA: ZS PA: PS	IA: PS PA: PS	IA: PS PA: 10 -PS, 8 -ZS	IA: PS PA: 8-PS, 6-ZS	IA: PS PA: 26-PS, 3 -ZS	IA: PS PA: PS	IA: PS PA: 6-PS, 3-ZS	IA: PS PA: 8-PS, 2-ZS, 1-CHS
Academic staff	IA: PS PA: PS	IA: PS PA: 18-PS, 8-ZS	IA: PS PA: 14-PS, 8-ZS	IA: PS PA: 9 - PS, 9 - ZS	IA: PS PA: 6-PS, 8-ZS	IA: PS PA: 16 -PS, 12-ZS, 1- CHS	IA: PS PA: 4-CHS	IA: PS PA: 4-PS, 5-ZS	IA: ZS PA: 9-PS, 2-ZS
Student support services and resources	IA: PS PA: PS	IA: PS PA: 22-PS, 4-ZS	IA: ZS PA: 21-PS, 1-ZS	IA: PS PA: 15-PS, 3 - ZS	IA: PS PA: PS	IA: ZS PA: PS	IA: PS PA: 3-PS, 1-ZS	IA: PS PA: 7-PS, 2-ZS	PA: PS PA: 6-PS, 1-ZS, 4-CHS
Public information	IA: ZS PA: ZS	IA: ZS PA: 9-PS, 16-ZS, 1-CHS	IA: ZS PA: 21-PS, 1-ZS	IA: PS PA: 17 -PS, 1 -ZS	IA: PS PA: 9-PS, 5-ZS	IA: ZS PA: 24 -PS, 5 -ZS	IA: ZS PA: PS	IA: PS PA: PS	IA: PS PA: PS

Note: PS – *full compliance*, SC – *significant compliance*, *PC – partial compliance*

Educational programmes: design, effectiveness, continuous monitoring

Identified issues at programme level are mostly local rather than systemic. The nature of the remarks is as follows:

- Duplication of course content;
- Formalistic involvement of students in programme design and revision;
- Insufficient involvement of employers, practitioners and international experts in programme design;
- Absence of programme development plans;
- Excessively broad coverage of professional standards;
- Insufficient number of elective courses;
- Lack of mechanisms for timely adaptation of programme content to labour market changes;
- Lack of provisions for students with special educational needs in syllabi;
- Use of outdated external reviews.

Academic staff

- Implementation of educational programmes without the participation of practitioners from relevant industries;
- Low publication activity in internationally indexed journals and journals recommended by the Committee for Control in Education and Science;
- Limited participation of academic staff in funded research and grant projects;
- Limited outgoing academic mobility of academic staff and insufficient involvement of international professors;
- Insufficient proportion of staff holding academic degrees in the relevant field;
- Insufficient involvement of academic staff in the design and updating of educational programmes.

Student support services and resources

Remarks mainly relate to resource provision:

- Insufficient number of electronic textbooks and teaching materials for core disciplines, including English-language educational literature;
- Limited availability of learning materials in the official language;
- Lack of modern laboratory equipment;
- Weak digitalisation of the educational process;
- Limited library resources.

Public information

Systemic issues include:

- Untimely updating of the university's official website;
- Publication of outdated internal regulatory documents;
- Lack of information in three languages;
- Ineffective website navigation;
- Insufficient information on educational programmes for prospective students on the website.

The implementation of quality assurance mechanisms at programme level, taking into account the above remarks, requires further systematic managerial decisions and strengthened monitoring and support of the implementation of quality assurance policy within educational programmes.

1.3 Assessment of the implementation of institutional quality assurance mechanisms at programme level

To provide a clear representation of programme accreditation findings, a heat map was developed based on a weighted compliance index with standards: 1 – full compliance, 0.75 – substantial compliance, 0.4 – partial compliance (Figure 3). The application of this tool made it possible to aggregate evaluation results across all educational programmes by each standard and each higher education institution and, as a result, to visually demonstrate the extent of implementation of institutional quality assurance mechanisms across institutions and educational programmes.

Values close to 1 (green zone) reflect a high and systematic implementation of standards, whereas a decrease in values indicates areas requiring managerial action.

Overall, most higher education institutions demonstrate high integral compliance index values, confirming the effectiveness of internal quality assurance systems. At the same time, uneven implementation of individual standards is observed. Under the standards *Academic Staff* and *Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment*, certain institutions show localised risk areas.

At the same time, the standard *Public Information*, according to the heat map, demonstrates relatively high values at programme level despite previously identified issues at institutional level. This may indicate stronger local implementation mechanisms at the level of educational programmes.

Standard	HEI 1	HEI 2	HEI 3	HEI 4	University 5	University 6	University 7	University 8	University 9
Policy for quality assurance	1	1	1	1	0.98	1	1	1	1
Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment	0.75	0.92	0.98	0.84	0.96	0.91	0.875	0.97	0.95
Student admission, progression (academic performance), recognition and certification	1	0.93	1	0.82	0.98	0.87	1	0.89	0.84
Educational programmes: design, effectiveness, continuous monitoring	0.75	1	1	0.89	0.89	0.97	1	0.92	0.90

Academic staff	1	0.92	0.92	0.88	0.86	0.88	0.4	0.86	0.95
Student support services and resources	1	0.96	0.99	0.96	1	1	0.94	0.94	0.76
Public information	0.75	0.82	0.99	0.99	0.91	0.96	1	1	1

Figure 3. Heat map of the implementation of institutional quality assurance mechanisms at programme level

1.4 Analysis of initial educational programmes

Particular attention within the analysis was given to initial educational programmes accredited in 2024–2025.

The presence of initial educational programmes requires increased attention from higher education institutions to the quality of programme design, as it is at this stage that quality assurance mechanisms are established which will determine programme sustainability during subsequent accreditation procedures.

The share of initial educational programmes is relatively low and accounts for 7.5% of the total number of educational programmes (Figure 4), indicating a relatively stable programme portfolio within higher education institutions.

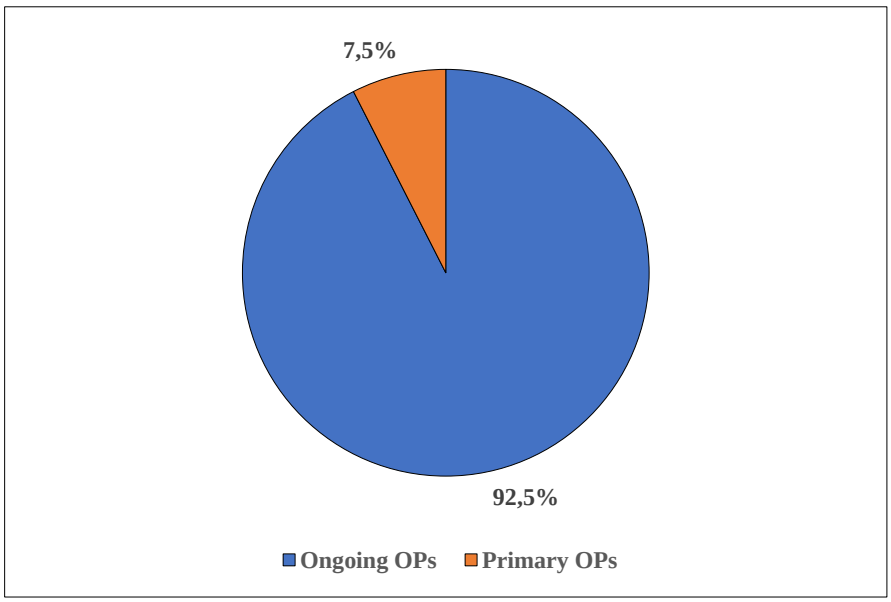

Figure 4. Share of accredited initial and continuing educational programmes

Figure 5 presents the fields of study of initial Bachelor's educational programmes – a total of 8 fields were identified. As shown in the figure, initial Bachelor's programmes are mainly concentrated in the fields *Engineering, Manufacturing and*

Construction and *Business, Administration and Law*, each accounting for 29.3%, followed by *Education* (17%).

Such concentration reflects both labour market demand and institutional strategic priorities.

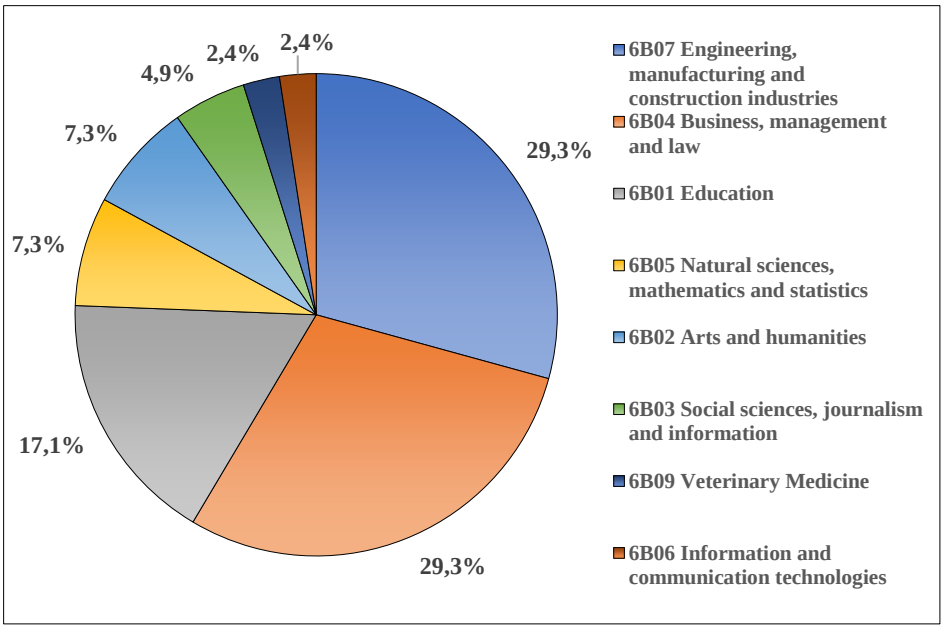

Figure 5. Fields of study of initial Bachelor's educational programmes

At Master's level, the range of fields narrows and a stronger concentration of initial educational programmes is observed in the field *Business, Administration and Law*, accounting for 50% of the total (Figure 6). This trend may be related to the attractiveness of these programmes; however, it also requires institutions to analyse graduate employability prospects and programme competitiveness.

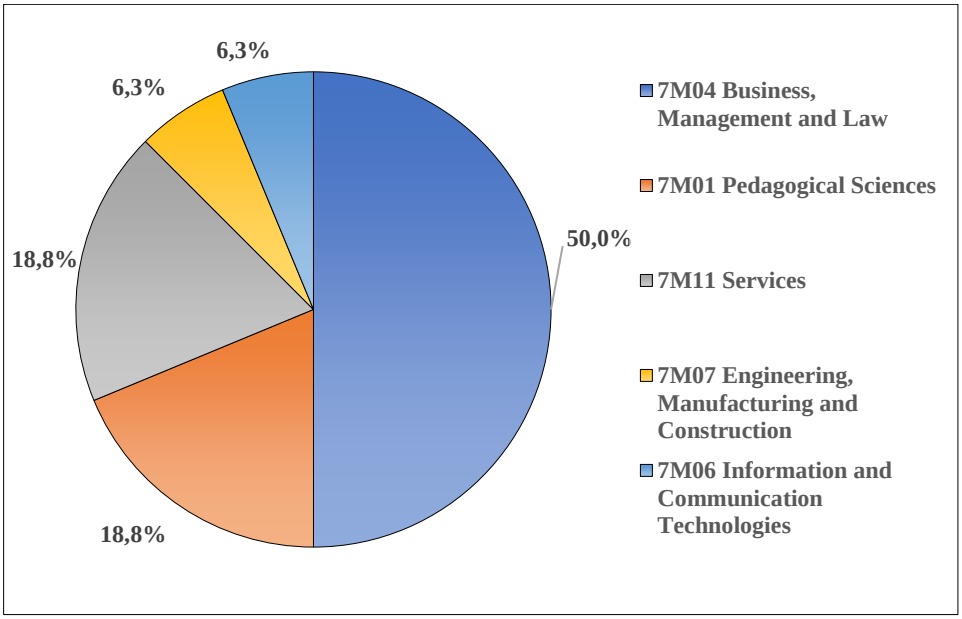

Figure 6. Fields of study of initial Master's degree programmes

At Doctoral level, the number of initial educational programmes is the smallest and is represented by two fields: *Business, Administration* and *Law and Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction*, each accounting for 50%. New fields of study require justification for launching new programmes, including sufficient research capacity and academic staff resources.

1.5 Typology of remarks and recommendations based on the initial programme accreditation findings

Analysis of remarks and recommendations of external expert panels on initial accreditation of Bachelor's educational programmes shows that the largest share of issues relates to the standards: *Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment - 53.7% and Academic staff - 51.2%* (Figure 7). This indicates that when launching new programmes, higher education institutions should pay particular attention to the practical implementation of student-centred learning and the provision of adequate academic staff capacity.

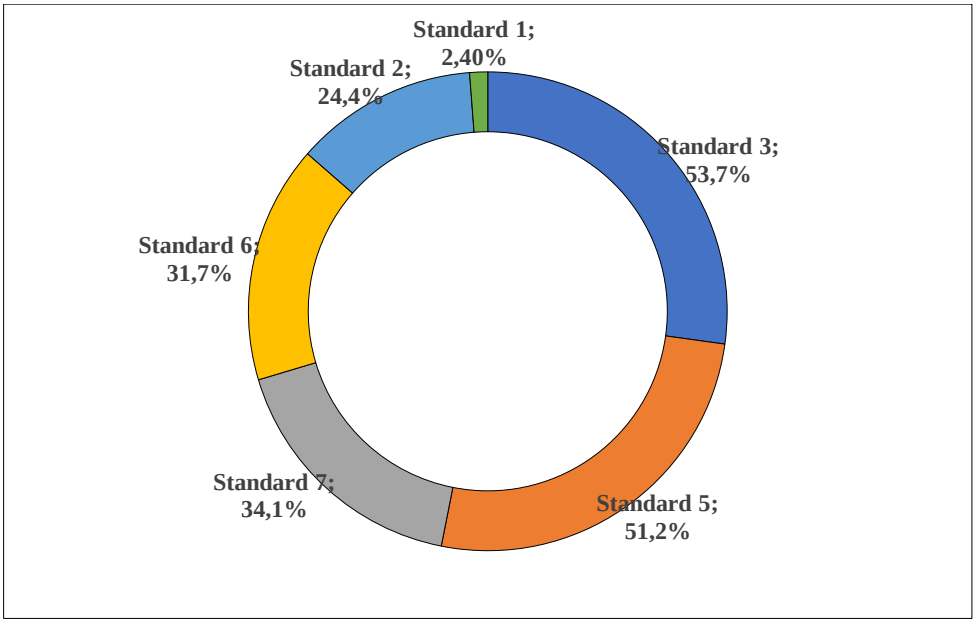

Figure 7. Distribution of remarks and recommendations of external expert panels by standards in initial accreditation of bachelor's programmes

The findings of initial programme accreditation reflect the readiness of higher education institutions to implement new educational programmes under existing accreditation standards. In contrast to continuing programmes, initial programmes tend to reveal typical risks related to programme design stage, staffing and resource provision, as well as student-centred learning implementation.

In this regard, recommendations of external expert panels were systematised by accreditation standards and levels of education, making it possible to identify the most vulnerable areas in launching new programmes and to formulate generalised findings that may serve as guidance for higher education institutions when designing and improving initial educational programmes.

Typical recommendations of external expert panels based on initial accreditation of Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral educational programmes are presented below.

Standard: Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

- ***Academic mobility***: develop regulations for organising academic mobility and research internships for Master's students; expand incoming academic mobility.
- ***Student support***: improve the quality of support for individual learning pathways; systematically develop digital learning support mechanisms.
- ***Student participation in programme design***: expand student involvement in the process of reviewing and revising curricula.
- ***Organisation of practical classes:*** implement mini-projects, team assignments and relevant practical cases, including national and international experience.
- ***Development of digital culture***: introduce and widely apply elements of e-learning.

Standard: Academic staff

- ***Faculty development and support****:* organise foreign language courses for academic staff; ensure academic mobility of teaching staff; introduce mentoring systems for early-career academics; ensure professional development of academic staff in the field of teaching disciplines.
- ***Balance between teaching and research:*** create incentives for academic staff to engage in research activities; support development of teaching, methodological and research materials related to the programme; involve international scholars in programme implementation and joint research activities.
- ***Quality of research publications***: enhance the quality and consistency of academic staff research output through publication in internationally indexed journals (Scopus, Web of Science).
- ***Modern teaching methods***: encourage the use of innovative teaching methods and interactive approaches; integrate practical cases from operating companies; implement research results into teaching practice.
- ***Involvement of practitioners:*** engage external professionals and industry practitioners in the educational process.

For Master's programmes, the highest concentration of recommendations relates to the standards *Academic staff* (56.3%) and *Student admission, progression, recognition and certification* (50%) (Figure 8). Compared to Bachelor's level, issues related to *Academic Staff* are more strongly connected with research activity requirements and participation in funded projects. The analysis also identifies challenges in forming student cohorts in Master's programmes, which may indicate

insufficient career guidance activities and limited competitiveness of educational programmes.

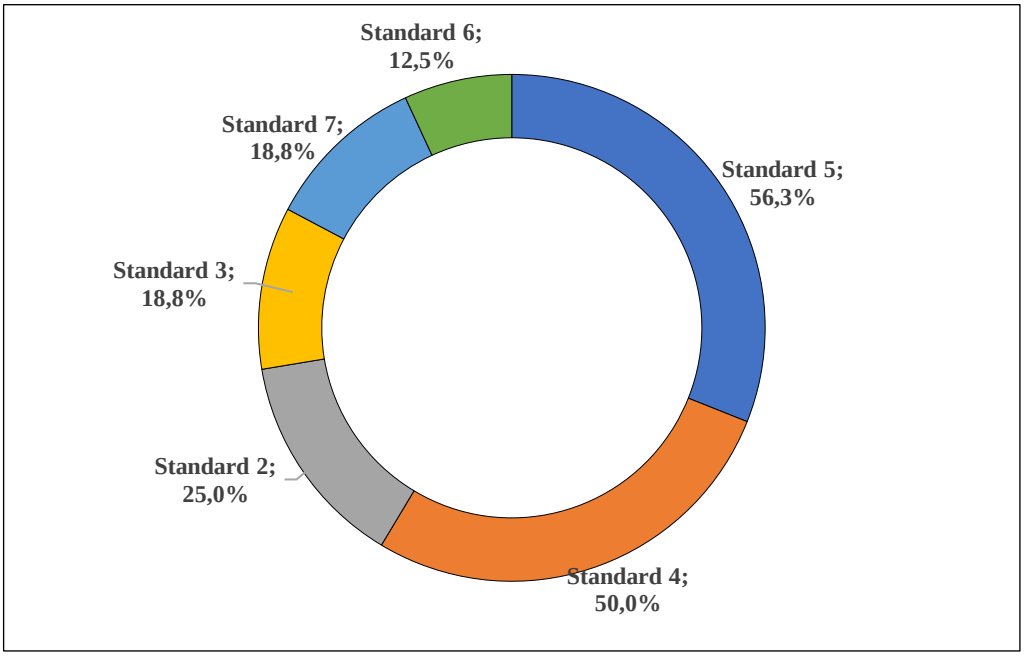

Figure 8. Distribution of remarks and recommendations of external expert panels by standards in initial accreditation of Master's programmes

Standard: Academic staff

- ***Quality of research publications:*** improve effectiveness of academic staff publication activity in high-ranking journals and citation rates; develop a plan for participation of academic staff in research projects with employers, including contractual research, national and international projects, and initiative-based research.
- ***Academic staff development and support:*** develop and implement a systematic professional development programme for academic staff; encourage obtaining international professional certifications.

Standard: Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

- ***Student recruitment***: conduct a comprehensive analysis of factors affecting enrolment, including programme competitiveness, admission conditions, awareness of the target audience and labour market demand; strengthen career guidance activities for the educational programme.

Findings of initial accreditation of Doctoral programmes demonstrate that the most problematic areas include: *Academic staff quality*, *Quality of research activity* and *Learning resources* (Figure 9). Recommendations of external expert panels are systemic and primarily concern the research dimension of educational programmes,

including research opportunities for doctoral students, publication activity of academic staff and strengthening research infrastructure.

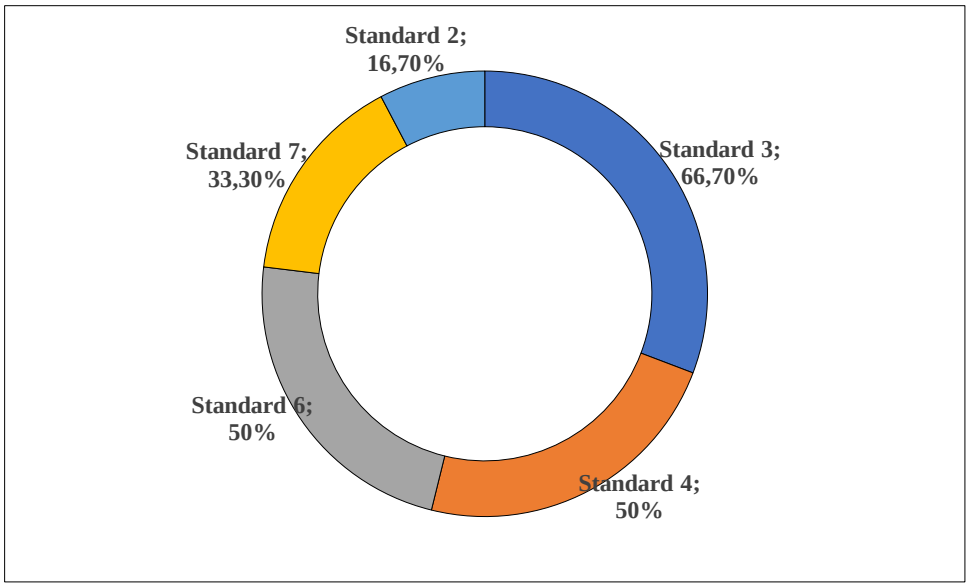

Figure 9. Distribution of remarks and recommendations of external expert panels by standards for initial accreditation of Doctoral programmes

Standard: Academic staff quality

- involve qualified industry practitioners to teach doctoral students in the core disciplines.
- publish research papers in the field of the educational programme and actively participate in annual competitions within the framework of the Grant Funding and Programme-Targeted Funding in the field of research.

Standard Quality of research activity

- encourage doctoral students to participate in international competitions and apply for research grants and scholarships from national and international foundations;
- implement practice-oriented forms of final assessment for doctoral students.

Standard: Learning resources

- expand laboratory, technical and research infrastructure for studying core courses and ensure provision of modern multimedia equipment in classrooms.

Overall, the identified recommendations demonstrate the need to strengthen the design of initial educational programmes based on comprehensive analysis of demand, competitiveness and implementation conditions.

1.6 Interaction with stakeholders based on VEG reports within the framework of initial programme accreditation

The analysis demonstrates the extent to which higher education institutions systematically organise engagement with stakeholders, whose involvement is essential for compliance with programme accreditation standards. External expert panel reports refer to stakeholder groups such as students, academic staff, graduates and employers. Stakeholders contribute through participation in institutional governance bodies such as Academic Councils, Scientific Councils and Industry Councils.

Interaction with all key stakeholder groups is implemented across all higher education institutions. Remarks are mainly developmental in nature and relate not to the absence of engagement practices but to the need for stronger systematisation, regularity and documentation (Table 2).

Regarding students, remarks were identified in less than half of the institutions (40%), indicating that most institutions have established feedback mechanisms and involve students in programme development.

Academic staff are generally actively involved in programme design and revision across institutions; identified remarks are mainly local. External expert panels highlight as good practice the interaction between academic staff of Karaganda University of Kazpotrebsoyuz and employers in the development of practical assignments within specialised courses.

Regarding employers, external expert panel reports demonstrate a wide range of interaction practices; however, in 40% of cases such interaction requires more systematic documentation and expansion of the partner network. It should be noted that the external expert panel positively evaluated cooperation with employers in South Kazakhstan University named after M. Auezov, particularly in the organisation of internships and programme design. In addition, external expert panels noted as good practice that since 2022 the International Engineering and Technological University annually organises the international employers' forum "Enhancing the role of employers in professional training as an indicator of quality in the design and implementation of educational programmes", involving partner enterprises and higher education institutions from Kazakhstan and abroad.

With regard to graduates, remarks account for 13% and relate to the absence of mechanisms for tracking career trajectories and limited involvement of graduates in alumni associations. At the same time, the most common forms of interaction with graduates include surveys and thematic events such as round tables. In some cases graduates also represent employers.

Stakeholder analysis demonstrates that challenges in stakeholder engagement are mainly process-related and connected not with the absence of engagement mechanisms but with uneven implementation and insufficient documentary evidence. Recurring

remarks across institutions and programmes indicate typical systemic gaps requiring managerial action.

Table 2. Matrix of stakeholder engagement analysis based on external expert panel reports

Stakeholder	Forms of engagement reported by higher education institutions	Identified problems (based on external expert panels reports)	Extent of prevalence across higher education institutions
Students	Design and revision of educational programmes, Surveys	1. Insufficient student participation in the process of reviewing and revising curricula; there is no formalised mechanism for their involvement. 2. No systematised and regular mechanisms have been introduced for collecting, processing and analysing student feedback, and prompt and effective response to the identified shortcomings is not ensured. 3. Low student awareness of opportunities to participate in the design and review of educational programmes.	40%
Academic staff	Design and revision of educational programmes, Surveys, Project assignments with employers	Incomplete involvement of academic staff in the processes of educational programme design, defining professional competencies, and forming the list of elective courses.	7
Graduates	Alumni Association, Design and revision of educational programmes, Surveys, Round tables	1. Career trajectories of graduates are not tracked. 2. Low awareness of graduates about the existence and activities of the Alumni Association.	13%
Employers	Design and revision of educational programmes, catalogue of elective courses, Surveys; Master classes, guest lectures, Project assignments with academic staff, Project	1. Limited employer involvement in the processes of planning, revising and evaluating educational programmes. 2. Employers' proposals and remarks aimed at improving the quality of the educational programme, as well as the degree of their participation, are not systematised, and there is no evidence base. 3. There is no	40%

	assignments, Work placement programmes, Review of educational programmes and final thesis, Participation in the Attestation Commission	systematic recording, analysis, and documentary confirmation of employer feedback when revising the content and structure of the educational programme	

Conclusion

The analysis of external expert panel reports on institutional, programme and initial programme accreditation for 2024–2025 made it possible to identify key trends, systemic challenges and development areas in the implementation of higher education quality assurance standards.

Overall, institutional quality assurance mechanisms are formally established in higher education institutions; however, their practical implementation at programme level remains uneven. The most problematic areas include academic staff capacity, student-centred learning, and student admission processes.

Analysis of initial educational programmes shows that at the stage of launching new programmes, higher education institutions face typical risks related to staffing, resource provision and student recruitment, which requires more thorough programme design.

Engagement with students, employers, graduates and academic staff is implemented across all institutions; however, it requires greater systematisation, regularity and documentary evidence.

Overall findings indicate the need to strengthen managerial decision-making at programme level. Strengthening internal monitoring, systematising stakeholder engagement and ensuring implementation of institutional decisions at programme level represent key directions for further enhancement of internal quality assurance systems in higher education institutions..

Appendix

List of accredited higher education institutions

No.	Higher education institution
1	ALT Mukhamedzhan Tynyshpaev University
2	S. Amanzholov East Kazakhstan University
3	Egyptian University of Islamic Culture Nur-Mubarak
4	Zhangir Khan West Kazakhstan Agricultural and Technical University
5	Kazakhstan-American Free University
6	Karaganda University of Kazpotrebsoyuz
7	International University of Tourism and Hospitality
8	International Educational Corporation
9	South Kazakhstan Pedagogical University named after O. Zhanibekov