

Maintaining Quality Assurance in Ukraine: Accreditation, Cooperation, and Anti-corruption

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Quality Assurance Amidst War

Accreditation of study programmes under martial law undergoes a unique and stringent process to ensure the quality of education and compliance within the context of exceptional circumstances.

During these 472 days since Russia started full-scale war, the whole Ukrainian society and educational institutions face resource limitations, operational challenges, disruptions in regular activities, blackouts, daily massive shelling, and air raid sirens. It became clear to us that the accreditation of study programmes under martial law should involve tailored processes that address the unique challenges faced by educational institutions during times of crisis. National Agency for Higher Education Quality (NAQA) adapted its processes to suit the conditions of martial law and became the only agency in the world which remains operational during the full-scale war. NAQA team work closely with educational institutions not only to evaluate curriculum content, faculty qualifications, infrastructure, and learning outcomes but to give a helping hand.

The Ukrainian government¹ temporarily allowed accreditation of study programmes in a remote mode, as well as made a decision on conditional (delayed) accreditation of study programmes without or with partial accreditation examinations. These amendments made it possible to carry out accreditations aiming to maintain educational standards, protect academic freedom, and ensure transparency despite the exceptional circumstances.

NAQA provides an accreditation process amidst war to ensure the quality of Ukrainian education and statistics show this. For the period of war, NAQA approved 671 decisions on accreditation according to the full procedure and 894 decisions on conditional (delayed) accreditation in accordance with the regulatory framework of martial law.

Besides the accreditations, cooperation with leading European and international organizations was also boosted during the war. For instance, NAQA became a member of the European Network of Academic Integrity (ENAI) and Global Academic Integrity Network (GAIN) and launched collaboration with Quality Matters (QM). Also, to enhance the quality of education, NAQA conducts regular webinars and workshops on topical issues of quality assurance, amendments to educational legislation, and tips on the accreditation process for the stakeholders on its own or co-organize together with foreign QA agencies and organizations.

Since Covid-19, NAQA hasn't suspended its activity and now, during the war, we do our best in the field of QA because we strongly believe that quality education is one of the key factors for rebuilding Ukraine after the war.

NAQA was created and functions as an institution that is designed to replace the outdated authoritarian (soviet) approach to higher education quality assurance and adheres to the policy of an advisory center that unites passionate educators who seek to reform and improve higher education in Ukraine even in the conditions of a full-scale war. Corruption is one of the biggest enemies of the quality of education. That is why NAQA is actively involved in all governmental initiatives to combat this unacceptable in the civilized world phenomenon, in particular, it helps

the National Agency on Corruption Prevention by participating in the initiation of training of anti-corruption specialists through the introduction of relevant study programs in higher education institutions.

Training of an anti-corruption commissioner within the study programs of the second (master's) level of higher education: steps to successful accreditation

Overcoming such a negative social phenomenon as corruption directly depends on the education system functioning effectiveness, and its adaptability to the requirements of the time. Acquiring additional competencies in the legal regulation of corruption prevention in the relevant fields, anti-corruption compliance, identification of corruption risks, development of effective anti-corruption tools, etc. by graduates will further contribute to the prevention of corruption in expert-analytical, scientific-research, artistic, political-organizational, media, teaching, production, public and socio-political activities.

Corruption in Ukrainian legislation is defined as "the use by a person of official powers or opportunities related to them for the purpose of obtaining an unlawful benefit or accepting such a benefit or accepting a promise/offer of such a benefit for oneself or other persons, or, accordingly, a promise/offer or provision of an unlawful benefit to a person, or at his request to other natural or legal persons with the aim of inciting this person to unlawfully use the official powers granted to him or the opportunities related to them".² Signs of corruption include the use of official authority in personal interests or the interests of a third party, conflict of interests, and other violations by officials or political figures.

As evidenced by the statistics of the international organization, Transparency International, The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) of Ukraine in 2022 is 33 points out of a possible 100. The country ranks 116th out of 180 countries, which is 6 positions higher than the previous year, 2021. In general, over the past 10 years, the CPI indicator of Ukraine has increased by 8 points. This may indicate that a systematic approach to combating corruption is being implemented in the country, which, despite military aggression, shows slow but steady progress (Fig. 1).

The creation and functioning of the National Agency on Corruption Prevention is considered one of the positive developments on the way to combating corruption in Ukraine³ (NACP), as the central body of the executive power, responsible for the formation and implementation of the state anti-corruption policy. In addition, NACP carries out active work on training and development of authorized units (persons) on issues of prevention and detection of corruption and raising the level of awareness of citizens on issues of anti-corruption and integrity.



Figure 1: Ukraine's success in the Corruption Perceptions Index over the past 10 years⁴

According to the results of the research "Effectiveness of anti-corruption commissioners in 2020" conducted by the NACP ⁵ it was identified that in some public organizations the duties of anti-corruption commissioner are performed by persons with insufficient professional level. At the same time, it was stated that such authorized persons operate in all central bodies of executive power, other national authorities, state enterprises, institutions and organizations, regional councils, regional state administrations, city and district councils, local self-government bodies, territorial communities, local bodies of executive power..⁶

At the beginning of 2023, the State Anti-corruption Program for 2023-2025 was approved, which, in particular, outlined the following problem: "The Institute of authorized units (persons) for the prevention and detection of corruption does not fully release its potential due to insufficient autonomy guarantees".⁷ One of the ways to overcome this problem is to introduce "together with partner higher education institutions, anti-corruption-oriented master's programs (in particular, interdisciplinary ones) within the limits of current specialties and fields of knowledge"⁸. The following strategic result is expected: "Commissioners for the prevention of corruption have, share and implement clear and effective standards of activity, which are developed by NACP together with other interested parties and are based on reasonable qualification requirements, quality selection for these positions, resource sufficiency and protection from interference"⁹.

Among the leading goals of the NACP, determined by the Strategy for training and development of authorized units (individuals) for the prevention and detection of corruption for 2022-2025, the following is also defined:

- development of own "branded" educational products of NACP (certificate programs, specialized offline and online courses, development of LMS platform of NACP - "Online training" on the Anti-corruption Portal¹⁰);
- development of the profession of an anti-corruption commissioner through the introduction of educational programs in the field of higher education.¹¹

It should be noted that an important step in the development of such a new profession is the development and approval of the professional standard "Anti-corruption Commissioner".¹² This

standard establishes qualification requirements and a list of competencies necessary for the effective performance of labor functions and is a guide for organizers (leaders, project groups, support groups) of study programs that are to provide applicants with additional professional qualifications.

Since corruption is a complex phenomenon that includes political, economic, social, and cultural aspects, it is not appropriate to limit the implementation of reforms only in the sphere of legislation and state bodies. The challenge for the sphere of higher education in Ukraine is the need to form in the consciousness of society in the short-term perspective a responsible attitude and understanding of value orientations in the fight against corruption. The initiative of HEIs to develop anti-corruption education in Ukraine is possible by introducing:

- specializations in existing study programs of the second (master's) level of higher education,
- creation of interdisciplinary programs,
- the opening of separate specialized study programs with an emphasis on the formation of competencies of the anti-corruption commissioner.

Such programs should ensure the coverage of the widest possible range of stakeholders and the efficiency of providing knowledge and training specialists on issues of corruption prevention.

It should be noted that at the initial stage, the involvement of higher education institutions in educational activities regarding the fight against corruption can also take place by:

- inclusion of professional topics in the relevant educational components,
- the use of innovative teaching methods (case studies, discussions) by teachers during classes for the formation of general competencies during training in study programs of various specialties, including those that do not provide for the assignment of the professional qualification of an anti-corruption commissioner. This proves the need for a comprehensive approach to the formation of a qualified specialist through both formal education and educational activities.

One of the strategic goals of the National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance is the quality of educational services by guaranteeing the quality of study programs and implementing an effective procedure for their accreditation.¹³ A mandatory condition for accreditation is compliance of the educational program and educational activities of the institution of higher education according to this educational program with the specified criteria.¹⁴ Taking into account or not taking into account the following requirements at the stages of design, initiation, implementation and preparation for accreditation of a study program can significantly affect the quality of the content of such a program (Fig. 2).

An important step in the successful accreditation of a master's study program, which includes a specialization in the training of an anti-corruption commissioner or an anti-corruption content component, is the monitoring by the internal system of quality assurance of higher education institutions of the compliance of the program with the requirements of the standard of higher education in the specified specialty, as well as the possibility for applicants to achieve learning outcomes, in particular additional ones (more than provided by the standard).

Special attention should be paid to the selection of highly qualified academic staff for teaching educational components that ensure the achievement of learning outcomes and the formation of relevant general and professional competencies regarding the content of anti-corruption activities. Since such study programs are only introduced at the second (master's) level of higher education, specialists who would not only be familiar with the legislative framework for the prevention, detection, and countering of corruption, but could also qualitatively prepare the commissioner for anti-corruption activities, until now in Ukraine was not prepared.

Corruption challenges are changing, so the anti-corruption activities that confront them must also be flexible to change. The constant monitoring and review of study programs provided for by the internal regulatory framework of the Higher Education Institution will help ensure the prompt provision of up-to-date information to applicants.

Criterion 1. The design and objectives of the study programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a clear understanding of the purpose of introducing specialization or an anti-corruption component into the content of the study program
Criterion 2. The structure and content of the study programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • formulation of competencies and learning outcomes necessary for the performance of further work functions; selection of educational components and their content; understanding the logic and sequence of teaching the specified educational components
Criterion 3. Access to the study programme and learning outcomes recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understanding of the target audience and clear requirements for persons who can start training
Criterion 4. Teaching and learning under the study programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • selection of learning forms and methods in order to achieve the specified main and additional (anti-corruption component) program learning outcomes
Criterion 5. Control measures, evaluation of students and academic integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • selection of forms of assessment
Criterion 6. Human resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • focusing attention on the qualifications of tutors who will ensure the implementation of the study program, in particular its anti-corruption component
Criterion 7. Educational environment and material resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assessment of available resources (financial, educational and methodological, material)
Criterion 8. Internal quality assurance of the study programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • compliance with established requirements for the initiation and implementation of the study program
Criterion 9. Transparency and publicity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • informing the public about the presence of an anti-corruption component in the study program

Figure 2: Consideration of accreditation criteria during the design, implementation and preparation for accreditation of the study program

Thus, the training of an anti-corruption commissioner within the framework of second (master's) level study programs in various fields of knowledge will contribute to the implementation by such specialists of procedures that minimize any misuses at enterprises and institutions, in banks and media holdings, schools and sports clubs, and will ensure transparency production processes and management decisions. Therefore, the introduction of specialization or an anti-corruption content block in existing study programs will be of interest to all who seek to improve study programs and provide wider opportunities for training and further employment of specialists from various fields of knowledge and specialties.

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