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## СОДЕРЖАНИЕ / МАЗМУНЫ

### СОВРЕМЕННЫЕ ТЕНДЕНЦИИ В ВЫСШЕМ ОБРАЗОВАНИИ

<b>Нурмагамбетов А.А., Черных Е.Г.</b> Модели финансирования высшего образования .....	5
<b>Tsediso Michael Makoelle</b> Inclusive Education Approach in Higher Education: A case of Kazakhstan .....	10
<b>Есекешова М.Д., Дуезханова А.Ә.</b> Кәсіптік білім беруде студенттердің ақпараттық мәдениетін қалыптастырудағы ақпараттық технологиялар мәні .....	15
<b>Әбдірахман Г.Б.</b> Курсы повышения квалификации как инструмент внедрения новых образовательных технологий в учебный процесс .....	18
<b>Сабитова А.А., Хусаинов О.Б.</b> Основные проблемы юридического образования на современном этапе развития Казахстана .....	21

### ПРИЗНАНИЕ АКАДЕМИЧЕСКИХ СТЕПЕНЕЙ И КВАЛИФИКАЦИЙ

<b>Ақзам. Ж.А.</b> Особенности процедуры признания и нострификации зарубежных документов об образовании в Республике Казахстан .....	23
--	----

### ЭФФЕКТИВНОСТЬ РЕАЛИЗАЦИИ АКАДЕМИЧЕСКОЙ МОБИЛЬНОСТИ В ВУЗАХ

<b>Ахметова А.А., Ордабаева С.К.</b> Академическая мобильность как основа развития международного сотрудничества .....	27
<b>Куатова А.А., Избасарова А.Б., Ачиева Э.А., Балмагамбетова В.М., Амангелдықызы А.</b> Особенности реализации академической мобильности в вузах .....	29
<b>Kaumenova A., Malgorzata Woch</b> Increasing the efficiency of academic mobility programs implemented at HEIs in Kazakhstan .....	31

### РАЗВИТИЕ ТРЕХЪЯЗЫЧНОГО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ В КАЗАХСТАНЕ

<b>Медешова А.Б.</b> Үштілділік бүгінгі қажеттілік .....	35
<b>Sarsembayeva A.</b> Teaching the English language in D. Serikbayev EKSTU within the framework of "step-by-step transition to the English language of instruction" project .....	39
<b>Тойғанбекова М.Ш., Р.Т.Наралиева</b> Қазақ тілін шет тілі ретінде оқытудың инновациялық әдістемесі .....	42

### ПОДГОТОВКА КАДРОВ ИНДУСТРИАЛЬНО-ИННОВАЦИОННОГО РАЗВИТИЯ КАЗАХСТАНА

<b>Матаева М.Х.</b> Гуманитарная составляющая индустриально-инновационного развития Казахстана .....	45
<b>Айтхожаева Е.Ж., Сейлова Н.А.</b> Подготовка кадров в области информационной безопасности в системе высшего профессионального и послевузовского образования .....	48
<b>Молдабекова М.С., Болегенова С.А., Асембаева М.К., Федоренко О.В.</b> Совершенствование системы профессиональной подготовки специалистов в магистратуре .....	53

### ПРАКТИКА МОДЕРНИЗАЦИИ

<b>Билялов Д.Н.</b> Оценка эффективности деятельности вузов в контексте перехода к корпоративному управлению .....	56
---	----

### РАЗВИТИЕ ТВОРЧЕСКИХ СПЕЦИАЛЬНОСТЕЙ В КАЗАХСТАНСКИХ ВУЗАХ

<b>Дарменова Р.А.</b> Сән өнері және дизайн туралы .....	59
<b>Сабдалиева Р.Б.</b> Значение хореографии в формировании эстетического, духовно-нравственного развития личности .....	61
<b>Бәкірова С.Ә.</b> Жас ерекшеліктеріне байланысты хореографиялық ұжымын ұйымдастыру .....	63
<b>Аймаганбетов М.Н., Ногаев К.Б.</b> Реализация педагогических принципов в методике преподавания дизайна и компьютерной графики .....	66

### ПОДГОТОВКА МЕДИЦИНСКИХ КАДРОВ РЕСПУБЛИКИ КАЗАХСТАН

<b>Даленов Е.Д., Тель Л.З., Абдулдаева А.А.</b> Медициналық университеттерде профилактикалық медицинаның білімі, ғылыми аспектілерін дамытудың инновациялық негіздері .....	69
---	----

### ИЗ ЖИЗНИ ВУЗОВ

<b>Ботабеков А.К.</b> 40 лет – началу подготовки кадров с высшим образованием в Мангистауской области .....	72
--	----

### КАЛЕЙДОСКОП СОБЫТИЙ

О Рабочей встрече представителей Центра Болонского процесса и академической мобильности МОН РК с представителями ФБГУ «Главэкспертцентр» (Москва, РФ), 22-24 сентября 2016 года .....	78
Об участии в международной конференции в г.Москва работников Центра Болонского процесса и академической мобильности МОН РК, 13-15 октября 2016 года .....	79
О научно-методическом семинаре «Полиязычное образование: опыт, проблемы и перспективы», 25 октября 2016 года .....	80
О международной конференции «Казахстан в Болонском процессе: достижения и перспективы», 25 ноября 2016 года .....	81
О международном семинаре: «Полиязычное образование как стимулирующий фактор академической мобильности: европейский опыт и Казахстан», 6 декабря 2016 г. ....	82





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## INCREASING THE EFFICIENCY OF ACADEMIC MOBILITY PROGRAMS IMPLEMENTED AT HEIS IN KAZAKHSTAN

*How to boost and raise efficiency of academic mobility programmes? What shall we pay close attention to while managing internally processes related to academic mobilities? What and how to supervise and monitor the implementation of academic mobility programmes?*

*Finally, how to encourage HEIs to develop and implement comprehensive internationalisation strategies, which will encompass international student and staff mobilities, internationalisation of curricula and digital learning, development of strategic cooperation, partnerships and capacity building?*

*This paper is a deliberate attempt to find out answers to those and many other questions, that might be asked by those responsible to manage the implementation of academic mobility programmes at HEIs in Kazakhstan, but also in many other countries around the globe.*

As a result of on-going globalization, academic mobility has been refocused in many national Higher Education policies discourses as an instrument to internationalize HEIs, improve quality of teaching, boost learning experience, transfer know-how and share experience, make researches more competitive, develop institutional partnerships, and to promote HEIs internationally, what on a final note, will allow them to gain visibility and be internationally recognized.

Academic mobility also ensures the development of international programs and research. It fosters the cultural integration and adds value to the learning experience.

Internationalization of HEIs without the development of academic mobility programmes is not possible. More, academic mobility is perceived as one of the main sources of any scientific and educational cooperation. What is more, development of such programmes brings many positive benefits not only to HEIs implementing those programmes, but to the country itself. Among others, it leads to:

- the increase of the competitiveness of Kazakhstani Universities on the international market, by improving the quality of education and research, but also by obtaining international accreditations (strengthening HEIs; position in international rankings). Moreover, participation in academic

mobility programmes boost creativity and improves competences and skills of academic staff, students and graduates, that also increase attractiveness of HEIs presented hereafter as a centers for the development of science and education;

- Strengthening HEIs' image at the local labour market.
- the economic growth of the country by «producing» well-educated, experienced internationally, and ambitious professionals competitive on a local labour market (raise of successful employability rate);
- the increase of quality of offered study programmes (I, II and III degree), which will be perceived as more attractive internally, but also by foreign students and potential academic or administrative staff;
- the increase of the number of joint educational projects and research carried out by Kazakhstani HEIs with foreign partners (in particular in the framework of the program Erasmus+, Bolashak, etc.).

Above mentioned, exemplary potential benefits are certainly attractive to each HEI willing to gain international recognition and develop its educational offer. But how to boost institutional dynamics and secure the most effective implementation of academic mobility programmes? What



kind of institutional policies could enhance «quality mobility»- its qualitatively and quantitatively proceeding?

Below are some recommendations that were produced based on the experience of Almaty Management University (AlmaU). AlmaU's internationalization policy is incorporated into the institutional strategy. International cooperation is an integral part of Almaty Management University in the area of quality assurance and compliance with international standards. Intense international contacts play a significant role in the development of international cooperation, as a strategic objective of the University, and integration of AlmaU into the world educational and scientific arenas. AlmaU maintains stable relationships with many foreign universities and international organizations from Europe, Asia, America and the CIS.

Key international activities of AlmaU:

- cooperation with foreign universities;
- partnership with international organizations;
- study abroad opportunities for faculty and students;
- hosting international guests at AlmaU;
- international rankings;
- international accreditations;
- organisation of international events at AlmaU;
- participation in international events and fairs;
- participation in international projects;
- international research opportunities;
- international promotion of AlmaU.

## International cooperation

In defining HEIs' internationalization strategies, and low awareness of students, academic and administrative staff about the need for development and participation in international exchange programmes results in weak results (low balance of academic mobility), and undevelopment of services provided to incoming international students and academic staff.



What is more, many HEIs do not have a transparent organizational structure, which could allow assigning easily employees responsible for specific issues related to managing international cooperation and academic mobility programmes, including those who are responsible to assist and work closely with foreign students or incoming lecturers.

Despite required structural changes, we shall not underestimate the need to obtain international accreditations of HEIs or its particular study programmes. For that HEIs' International Offices shall constantly strive for developing institutional cooperation and creating new possibilities for exchange and international cooperation, which in the future will secure further development of HEIs' international networks, and will result in conducting more researches, organizing international conferences or initiating joint publications.

## Promotion

Unpopularity of academic mobility programmes, and relatively small number of incoming and outgoing mobility may be related with limited knowledge about available programs, exchange or research programmes, available scholarships, and other opportunities for collaboration.

Therefore, only an effective internal and external promotion of academic mobility programmes could secure constant increase of number of Kazakhstani students and teaching staff going abroad, but also the number of foreigners studying or lecturing at Kazakhstani HEIs (both, coming for exchange or studying on paid bases).

HEIs shall also recognize and promote studies in Russian language (language of instruction), which could attract attention of many foreign students. Moreover, HEIs shall strengthen and manage network of students undertaking Russian language courses, and create a system of available scholarships (e.g. accessibility to Russian language courses free of charge).

Given that some foreign students are unaware of study opportunities in Kazakhstan; this could be a country policy of promoting Kazakhstani HEIs worldwide on world education exhibitions, such as EAIE, NAFSA, etc. The HEIs should take on the mission to promote the country whenever its representatives travel abroad and meet partners and colleagues.

## Information flow

Improving internal communication and flow of information is essential to make it simple and effortless. Developing internal system that allows properly using and managing data related to academic mobility. It is important to realize that an effective communication is a key factor that compulsorily has to be secured internally by cooperation of academic mobility specialists and management of all HEIs' Departments. Data base (or an informative system) on current offer of academic mobility programmes should be created and introduced to all potentially interested students, employees and teaching staff.

Information should be spread through all accessible channels: printed brochures, leaflets, postcards hanged inside HEIs on wall notice-boards; on-line database (e.g. HEIs' official websites but also social media, like Facebook or Vkontakte, that are becoming more and more popular among young generation), informative or consultative meetings with Academic Mobility Specialist or representatives of HEIs' International Offices.

Moreover it is important to streamline and update the system of collective information with information on available training programmes, valid international agreements concluded between HEIs, academic mobility statistics, information on successful participants, their achievements, and available scholarships or grants.

## Results' dissemination

Integrating learning outcomes in the home university will bring fresh overview and help detect disadvantages of the current system.

Participation in academic mobility programmes cannot be completed without successful dissemination of its results: gained knowledge and experience, best practices as well as know-how shall be disseminated among academic staff, students and graduates by using all accessible means and channels (e.g. organized trainings, consultative meetings, sharing written recommendations, etc.).

Therefore, it is crucial to secure and provide conditions for internal dissemination of learning outcomes inside each





HEIs. The HEIs should be transparent and willing to share their knowledge and experience in order to reach for the common goal of enhancing academic mobility on the country level.

### Budget

It is important to secure HEIs budget to assist the development of academic mobility programmes. The budget should also be available to maintain the friendly environment for incoming students and faculty, like organizing International Days, networking events and sightseeing tours.

Certain amount of state budget could be allocated and distributed among HEIs of the country on a competition base, so that every HEIs has equal right to access the resources proving it qualifies to send/receive students and faculty.



Also, whenever it is possible, HEIs should grant scholarships from their own financial resources, or apply for external funding (e.g. Erasmus+ programme), that will be available to the best lecturers, students or students with financial difficulties. This will additionally motivate students to assure their good academic performance, and will secure equal opportunity to participate in student mobility programmes to everyone.

### Institutional support

HEIs' internal policies must eliminate all possible cases that may discourage students to participate in academic mobility due to e.g. necessary extension of the period of their studies, for example of one semester.

Also it is important to introduce flexibility on academic year planning, and remove all regulations not allowing students to take some exams, as they can be taken only once a year. Each HEIs should nominate administrative units responsible for launching and supporting the development of international research projects.

It will be also welcomed, to introduce a mechanism of flexible time management and teaching duties for academic employees involved in international research projects, and consider their activity while evaluating their professional achievements or to promote them. HEIs shall also ensure appropriate conditions for foreign coordinators hosted at receiving HEIs.

It is also important to support students and academic staff during their stay abroad, but also after their return to the country, e.g. increase the recognition of their academic mobility- conducted internships, training programs, gained ECTS points, etc.

Moreover, HEIs shall secure human resources, specialist of academic mobility who will be managing or successfully assisting the implementation of academic mobility programmes.

### Motivating

It is important to constantly motivate and encourage potential participants of academic mobility programmes. HEIs can implement one of two, tough of soft motivation system according to ministerial regulations and their internal policies.

The first one could establish an obligation to participate in academic mobility programmes by all HEIs students (e.g. such an obligation could be included in written contract signed by all students who has successfully went through admission process), or could encourage participation of academic staff, and their involvement in researches conducted outside the country by using relevant promotion requirements in internal promotion procedures (e.g. in order to receive a promotion, academic staff has to prove his/her international achievements, conducted training, or gained experience, that allowed him/her to extend his/her teaching competences).

Also, building a scholarship offer and launching grant programs to attract the best students and laureates of international scientific competitions will be appreciated.

### Study program development

HEIs' internationalization through implementation of academic mobility programmes shall lead to raising of the attractiveness of study programmes offered to local but also to foreign students/lecturers.

HEIs should also raise the number of study programmes taught fully in English, and those which will be lectured by foreign academicians what will raise the variety of offered study programmes and its content.

The presence of international teaching staff is an important internationalization factor. HEIs can also use the possibilities to create study programmes with the help of foreign Partner Universities, e.g. development of courses taught in the frame of double degree or double diploma studies.

Such an educational offer will be a great foundation to obtain international accreditations, as well as will allow enrolled students to acquire competencies and knowledge appreciated on the international labor market.

Moreover, greater flexibility of the curriculum will enable better use of visiting lecturers by organizing study visits or entire modules within academic education cycle. By participating in such classes, seminars, or workshops, students, teaching staff and academic staff will be able to benefit from the experience of foreign educational and research centers in their home country.

Furthermore, it is very important to develop e-learning system, including massive open online courses (MOOCs). E-learning courses will not only complete students' knowledge gained thanks to traditional classes, but can also be a part of HEIs international promotion, as they will prove the innovation and new methodologies used by HEIs.

Online platform can serve as a cultural bridge, and be used to build a cultural dialogue and facilitate understanding of Kazakh culture by foreigners, who after arriving to Kazakhstan could integrate much faster.

### Providing appropriate services to incoming mobility

To secure the raise of incoming mobility HEIs shall adjust service provided to international students or academic staff in order to match their needs.

The most important here is to strengthen and develop the skills of university staff but also to develop internal mechanisms and services assisting international students during their stay at HEIs in Kazakhstan (e.g. visa and immigration assistance, accommodation assistance, or translation services provision).





Very important it is the integration and complementarity of the system at various levels of the institution (e.g. central service, but also services provided by individual organizational units or local academic staff), and the formation of mechanisms to encourage social and cultural integration (e.g. involvement of Student Affairs Department).

Another important thing is to develop the competence of administrative staff, including their language skills. Administrative staff should be prepared to handle a larger number of students and researchers from abroad.

This could be done by organized workshops on developing practical intercultural skills that are crucial for those working or studying in international environment. HEIs shall also create and implement programs that will integrate international students (and academic staff) with local academic community.

### Language training

It is crucial to develop language competences of students, graduates, academics and administrative staff. English is *Lingua franca* of modern science, therefore HEIs' staff as well as students should be fluent in it.

Good command of English will enable students and academic staff to benefit from the experience of foreign centers of research and teaching, as well as ensure the transfer of Kazakhstani achievements abroad, e.g. researches or publications. It will also facilitate students' application process, and secure the possibility to be chosen to participate in academic mobility programme, as proficiency in language is one of the main requirement and selection criteria.

Moreover, it is important to provide incoming mobility with the possibility to attend university-based Kazakh or Russian language classes, cultural centers, and take exams proving/certifying Russian or Kazakh language knowledge. English should become the second, parallel language used at HEIs by those aspiring to participate in the academic mobility programmes.

### Alumni

Expanding the monitoring system of foreigners graduating from Kazakhstani HEIs in order to follow the fate of its ex-students. HEIs shall create a network of contacts with foreign graduates, and maintain relationships with people who often takes important positions in their countries of origin.

Foreign graduates are excellent ambassadors not only for Kazakhstani HEIs but Kazakhstan as a country, that realise their positive emotions. This network of contacts (could be used in the promotional activities and disseminating various information) in the longer term could be used to create with Kazakhstani business circles an efficient employability system with the aim to employ the best graduates by Kazakhstani companies.

This kind of HEIs' cooperation with business and international corporations could be an important factor in attracting the most talented candidates from abroad, and therefore to raise the number of incoming mobility.

### Summary

The implementation of proposed recommendations should not only facilitate international exchange and contribute to achievement of academic mobility objectives, but also make an important contribution to reform and further internationalization of HEIs in Kazakhstan.

Certainly, it is not possible to become an internationally recognized HEI without paying attention to recommendations specified in this document, nor without the full involvement of all stakeholders and entities shaping the system of HEIs' international cooperation in Kazakhstan.

Practical recommendations for optimizing the process of effectiveness of academic mobility programmes presented in this article will allow HEIs to manage mobility processes systematically and holistically, and chose priorities in accordance with individual interests of certain students and academic staff.