



This review method
is ESG-compliant

International Programme Accreditation

**Nazarbayev University
Graduate School of Education**

PhD in Education

External Quality Assurance Agency
Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education UK
Date of Accreditation Visit: 3-6 November 2025

Review Report
November 2025

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About this review

This is a report of an International Programme Accreditation conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Nazarbayev University's Graduate School of Education. The review took place from 3rd to 6th November 2025 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Mark Cooper
- Dr Nadeem Khan
- Mr Jack Medlin (student reviewer)

The QAA Officer for this review was Dr Jennifer Cann.

International Programme Accreditation (IPA) offers institutions outside the UK the opportunity to have a review by the UK's Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). The review benchmarks the institutions' quality assurance processes against international quality assurance standards set out in Part 1 of the [Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area \(ESG\)](#).

In International Programme Accreditation, the QAA review team:

- makes conclusion against each of the 10 standards set out in Part 1 of the ESG
- makes conditions (if relevant)
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- comes to an overall conclusion as to whether the institution meets the standards for International Programme Accreditation

A summary of the findings can be found in the section: [Key findings](#). The section [Explanations of the findings](#) provides the detailed commentary.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission. A dedicated section explains the method for [International Programme Accreditation](#) and has links to other informative documents. For an explanation of terms see the [Glossary](#) at the end of this report.

Key findings

Executive summary

Opened in 2010, Nazarbayev University was founded by the then President of Kazakhstan to serve as a model of higher education in Kazakhstan. It enjoys special status as an autonomous university, which enables it to operate independently of and in consultation with the Ministry of Science and Higher Education. Its purpose is to support the ambition set out in the National Strategy 2050 which aims for Kazakhstan to figure amongst the top 30 developed countries by the middle of this century. The research-intensive university has eight academic schools including the Graduate School of Education which is the focus of this report.

The Graduate School of Education (NUGSE)

Originally a Centre for Educational Policy (CEP), the Graduate School of Education was established in 2012. Its development was supported by working in partnership with the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education and the University of Pennsylvania (UPenn). The two universities provided advice and quality assurance for the development and subsequent implementation of the programmes under review. This relationship that has continued until recently when it was concluded that the maturity of the School was such that their input was no longer necessary.

The Graduate School of Education's strategic plan (2024-2028) confirms its vision of becoming a globally recognised and influential school producing impactful research, innovative teaching and meaningful societal contribution. It aims to impact educational change and equality throughout Kazakhstan, Central Asia and beyond.

The School's mission states that:

“The Graduate School of Education is committed to leading educational excellence and reform in Kazakhstan, Central Asia and beyond by integrating high-quality research, culturally responsive and innovative teaching, and active community engagement. We empower individuals to thrive in a diverse and interconnected world, making a significant impact on education locally, nationally and globally.”

The NUGSE portfolio currently comprises three programmes:

MA Multilingual Education – a full-time Masters programme over two years

MSc Educational Leadership – a ‘low residency’ programme during which students attend for intensive blocks and study online for the rest of the time. The MSc currently has four specialist pathways in inclusive education, school education, multilingual education and higher education.

PhD in Education – a full-time 4 year programme which includes taught modules, an 8 week period at University of Pennsylvania and two compulsory blocks of experience as a Graduate Teaching Assistant.

The most recent innovation and changes related to the quality assurance of the School stem from the 2024 QAA institutional International Quality Review (IQR) and the periodic review of the School. It was the first school in the university to undergo periodic review and is working on the actions that were identified during the process. Following university policy, the School is now also implementing annual monitoring; the institution-wide ‘closing the loop’ ‘you said.. we did’ policy and pre- and post- moderation of assessment. A number of

minor modifications are made annually to programmes following feedback from stakeholders and new programmes are being planned for 2027.

NUGSE was ranked in the 176–200 band in the THE World University Rankings for Education. It has a vibrant research culture which is supported through collaborative faculty and student research projects, participation in The Central Asia Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Transformation (CARCEIT), Leadership in the Kazakhstan Educational Research Association (KERA) and NORRAG (Geneva Graduate Institute). It also publishes a student-led journal, NUGSE Research in Education (RiE).

PhD in Education

Launched in 2013-14, the Doctor of Philosophy in Education was developed in collaboration with the University of Cambridge and the University of Pennsylvania who continued their involvement in quality assurance processes until 2023. Originally a three and a half year programme, its duration was extended to four years and 243 ECTS in 2017. Additions included further underpinning of English language at research proposal and thesis stages (which have recently been removed due to a change of university policy); additional research methods input; a course in teaching in the university context to underpin the compulsory teaching assistantship, and the introduction of a qualifying examination in year two.

The PhD comprises 90 ECTS of 'content' covering research methods, language and critical skills development and underpinning debates on educational subjects such as philosophy, policy and globalisation. The second year is mainly focussed on preparation and defence of a research proposal followed by two years of concentration on the preparation and defence of the thesis. Students also complete an 8 week period of international study in the fall of the second year and are required to successfully complete two university teaching assistantships, credits from this are included in the content-based course credits. There is an expectation that students will continue to study full-time and document this (40 hours per week) over the Summer period.

| PhD programme total (from fall 2025) | | |
|---|--------------------|-----------------------|
| | No. Courses | Credits (ECTS) |
| ECTS content courses | 12 | 90 |
| Non-ECTS research-based courses | 12 | N/A |
| Proposal Defence | 1 | 25 |
| Thesis Defence | 1 | 128 |
| Total | 26 | 243 |

To graduate, students must complete all required coursework, pass the Qualifying Examination, and successfully pass the Research Proposal Defence and the final Thesis Defence. Students each have a main supervisor (advisor) who is allocated during the first year in consultation with the student, and a co-advisor.

The programme attracts between 55 and 100 applicants each year from Kazakhstan and further afield and normally recruits between 8 and 10 high calibre students from these. Whilst the programme remains highly selective and much sought after, applications have

declined year on year since 2022. The current cohort includes 46 active students, 6 of whom are international. Students receive a stipend and support with accommodation where required so that they do not have to work during their studies.

In reaching conclusions about the extent to which Nazarbayev University's Graduate School of Education's programmes meet the 10 ESG Standards, the QAA review team followed the evidence-based review procedure as outlined in the handbook for International Programme Accreditation (November 2023). The University provided the review team with a self-evaluation and supporting evidence. During the review visit, which took place from 3rd to 6th November 2025, the review team held a total of eleven meetings with the University and Graduate School of Education senior management team, academic staff, students and alumni from all three programmes, professional services management and staff and external stakeholders. The review team also had the opportunity to observe the University's facilities and learning resources on the extensive Nazarbayev University campus.

In summary, the team found seven examples of good practice and was able to make some recommendations for improvement and enhancement. The recommendations are of a desirable rather than essential nature and are proposed to enable the University to build on existing practice which is operating satisfactorily but which could be improved or enhanced. The team did not set any conditions.

Overall, the team concluded that the PhD in Education of Nazarbayev University's Graduate School of Education **meets** all standards for International Programme Accreditation.

QAA's conclusions about Nazarbayev University's Graduate School of Education's PhD in Education

The QAA review team reached the following conclusions about the higher education provision at Nazarbayev University's Graduate School of Education.

European Standards and Guidelines

Nazarbayev University's Graduate School of Education's PhD in Education meets all of the 10 ESG Standards and Guidelines.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at Nazarbayev University's Graduate School of Education in relation to the PhD in Education:

- The systematic and comprehensive involvement of PhD students in quality assurance and enhancement. (ESG Standard 1.1)
- The extensive engagement by NUGSE with its external stakeholders and alumni, ensuring meaningful involvement by them in key quality processes. (ESG Standard 1.1)
- The implementation and systematic adoption by staff of pre- and post-moderation of assessment, and the awareness that students have of this process (ESG Standard 1.3)
- The culture of integrating the student voice, and the open, supportive relationship between PhD staff and students (ESG Standard 1.3)
- The availability to faculty and support staff of international teaching accreditation through Advance HE, offering the opportunity to gain supported opportunities for reflection on their professional practice. (ESG Standard 1.5)
- The extensive resources, facilities and support services available to students, including the addressing of digital poverty (ESG standard 1.6)
- The role of the student government in promoting students' interests and the wider community building activities available to students (ESG standard 1.6)

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Nazarbayev University's Graduate School of Education in relation to the PhD in Education:

- Ensure that notes of Advisory Board meetings are sufficiently detailed and structured in such a way that they clearly document and evidence stakeholder involvement in quality processes and influence on programme enhancement (ESG Standard 1.1)
- Consolidate the action plans from monitoring and accreditation into a single, 'live' overarching action plan document in order to facilitate tracking. (ESG standard 1.10)

Explanation of the findings about Nazarbayev University's Graduate School of Education PhD in Education

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

Terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers have been included in a [brief glossary](#) at the end of this report. A fuller [glossary of terms](#) is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the operational description and handbook for the [review method](#), also on the QAA website.

Standard 1.1 Policy for quality assurance

Institutions should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders should develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders.

Findings

1.1 Nazarbayev University (NU) operates a comprehensive, institution-wide quality assurance framework that is fully aligned with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). The framework is formalised through published policies and procedures governing programme design, delivery, monitoring and review across the Graduate School of Education (GSE). Oversight at University level is provided by the Academic Quality Committee (AQC), supported by the Academic Quality Enhancement team, ensuring responsibilities are clearly defined and consistently applied. Annual Programme Monitoring (APM) reports for each programme feed into the School Quality Enhancement Report, which is scrutinised by the AQC, providing a robust escalation route for risks and enhancement themes. The framework is embedded in routine governance and strengthened by systematic processes such as “closing the loop,” which now operates at course, programme and School levels, supported by the Learning and Teaching Committee and Vice Dean of Academic Affairs.

1.2 The review team identified good practice in the systematic and comprehensive involvement of PhD students in quality assurance and enhancement. Students hold voting membership on the PhD committee and School level bodies and their feedback is triangulated through anonymised course evaluations, Graduate Exit Surveys and structured “You said, we did” communications. This inclusive approach is reinforced by programme level reporting templates and committee agendas that explicitly track student input and actions taken. These mechanisms demonstrate a mature quality culture and transparent responsiveness to the student voice.

1.3 The review team also identified good practice in NUGSE’s engagement with external stakeholders and alumni. Historically, NUGSE relied on strategic partnerships with the University of Cambridge and the University of Pennsylvania for independent external review, which informed programme development and benchmarking. Since the conclusion of these partnerships in 2023, NUGSE has established an Advisory Board comprising ministry representatives, alumni, employers and academics to sustain externality. While this development is positive, **the review team recommends that care is taken to ensure that notes of Advisory Board meetings are sufficiently detailed and structured in such a way that they can serve as clear evidence of stakeholder involvement in quality processes and influence on programme enhancement.** Until such documentation is routinely visible in APMs and School reports, external assurance remains an area for on-going attention.

1.4 Programme level governance arrangements are well embedded and differentiated to reflect the nature of each award with the School. For the PhD, assurance is strengthened through two committees: the PhD Committee, which oversees curriculum and policy, and the Higher Degrees Committee, which monitors thesis examination and doctoral milestones. These structures collectively demonstrate that NU’s policy framework is operationalised effectively across all programmes. These structures that have been put in place for quality monitoring collectively demonstrate that NU’s policy framework is operationalised effectively across all programmes.

1.5 In conclusion, the review team confirms that **Standard 1.1 is met**, with a low level of risk. The policy architecture is coherent, institutionally anchored and demonstrably capable of driving enhancement, as evidenced by substantive programme modifications and responsive governance practices. The Advisory Board provides a credible mechanism for external engagement, but its influence on policy and enhancement should now be evidenced through documented outputs in monitoring reports.

Standard 1.2 Design and approval of programmes

Institutions should have processes for the design and approval of their programmes. The programmes should be designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated, and refer to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.

Findings

2.1 The Graduate School of Education has implemented the institutional formal, multi-layered process for the design and approval of academic programmes. The process is articulated in the Programme Approval Process Flowchart and the Institutional Effectiveness webpage. Senior leaders confirmed that processes are consistently applied and well understood by the stakeholders concerned, and approval by School committees and Academic Council had been obtained for each programme and subsequent modifications.

2.2 At the School level, programme development is led by the NUGSE Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC), whose bylaws define scope, membership, and quorum. The LTC ensures faculty ownership of programme design while operating within institutional policies. Members reported that the committee reviews proposals and examines evidence of alignment with the University's strategic goals.

2.3 Programme proposals are developed collaboratively by the LTC and faculty, guided by the Academic Policies and Procedures for Graduate Programs and the Regulatory Framework for Graduate Programs. Staff described systematic use of these reference documents to ensure compliance with the university's graduate attributes and quality standards. CurrlQunet serves as the central digital platform for programme development, version control, and approval workflows. Academic support staff explained how the system captures the full audit trail of design decisions and committee feedback. Faculty reported that CurrlQunet enhances constructive alignment between learning outcomes, assessments, and credit values.

2.4 Institutional scrutiny is provided through sequential review by the Academic Quality Committee (AQC) and the Academic Council. Both bodies test evidence of market need and compliance with policy before recommending approval. External reference points are embedded throughout programme design. The PhD in Education is explicitly mapped to EQF Level 8, the Bologna Framework, and the Dublin Descriptors. The University's engagement with the European University Association's Institutional Evaluation Programme provides a further layer of assurance that its quality systems are externally benchmarked.

2.5 Programme aims and learning outcomes are clearly articulated in the Student Handbook and reinforced during orientation sessions led by senior faculty. Students confirmed that learning outcomes are communicated effectively and referenced throughout their studies. Faculty and students described the Handbook as the key reference point for progression and assessment expectations.

2.6 During NUGSE's early development, strategic partners such as the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Cambridge played a key role in programme design. Meetings with senior and academic staff confirmed that these relationships have now

transitioned toward research collaboration, reflecting growing institutional maturity. The School recognises the importance of engaging independent external experts for future programme reviews and approvals to safeguard impartiality and standards. The team considers this evolution appropriate and aligned with international good practice.

2.7 At course level, learning outcomes are embedded within syllabi and mapped to programme and institutional graduate attributes. Students progress from structured coursework to independent research, supported by formal milestones and research supervision.

2.8 The design of the PhD programme integrates a compulsory Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) requirement intended to build teaching competence and professional readiness. Faculty explained that students must complete two graduate teaching internships, often placed in other academic Schools within the university due to the limited number of courses within NUGSE. While the placements broaden pedagogical exposure, giving them the opportunity to teach at university level, students noted variability in relevance and workload across host Schools. Faculty supervisors acknowledged that cross-school assignments can challenge workload balance, particularly when combined with doctoral research obligations. Training through the Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching (CILT) provides pedagogical preparation, yet some students suggested a need for tailored induction before teaching outside their discipline. Overall, the GTA model contributes meaningfully to professional development, but its compulsory nature and placement logistics warrant on-going review to ensure equity, relevance, and sustainability.

2.9 External stakeholder engagement is active although in relatively early stages of development. Employers and alumni contribute through advisory boards and feedback events. Examples were given of the extensive consultation that has taken place to inform the development of a new Bachelor's programme which has included surveys and consultations with prospective employers and alumni. In addition, stakeholders praised the high calibre and employability of GSE graduates but supported greater formalisation of their input into curriculum design. The review team noted that the school has begun aligning its actions with the institutional plan for engagement with the GSE Advisory Board.

2.10 NUGSE has effective, transparent processes for the design and approval of programmes that are systematically implemented ensure they that meet the objectives set for them. The review team therefore concludes that **Standard 1.2 is met**, with a low level of risk.

Standard 1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

Institutions should ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach.

Findings

3.1 Students at Nazarbayev Graduate School of Education (NUGSE) have access to a flexible learning system which considers and attends to their diverse needs – through the use of elective courses, and specialised pathways. When triangulating this in meetings with students, the panel heard how this approach allows students to broadly align their studies with their passions and/or career aspirations.

3.2 Assessments occur through a range of different methods, and staff are regularly trained in a range of pedagogical approaches – including how to effectively set rubrics, moderation, and constructive feedback. When speaking to students across all programmes, the team was able to identify that students did receive a diverse range of authentic assessment which they believed was preparing them for life after graduation. These students also felt well prepared for their assessments, understanding what was expected from them. They receive timely and constructive feedback across their assessments which allows them to improve.

3.3 Alumni described how authentic assessments such as ethics presentations and grant proposals prepared them for scholarly work. Student engagement in programme development is evident from multiple sources. Students hold voting membership on key committees, and examples were provided of how their feedback has resulted in concrete programme adjustments. Surveys, consultations, and course evaluations provide additional mechanisms for input. Annual and exit surveys managed by the Office of the Provost generate data that inform programme monitoring and enhancement. Academic managers described a growing culture of evidence-based decision-making supported by institutional research analytics.

3.4 The university has introduced a new approach to internal moderation of assessment which involves staff working together to examine assessment briefs when they are initially developed and to undertake sample moderation of students' work. The NUGSE is an early and competent adopter of this approach, which students were also aware of. **The team identified good practice in the implementation and systematic adoption by staff of pre- and post-moderation for assessment, and the awareness that students have of this process.** This is applicable to Masters and PhD course assessments in the graduate school. As there is no external examiner system in operation, and particularly now that there is no input from the University of Cambridge and University of Pennsylvania, this is an important development.

3.5 Pedagogical approaches are reviewed regularly through the use of Course Evaluation Surveys and through direct co-collaboration with students which feeds into Annual Programme Monitoring reports. From speaking to students, the team identified that it is clear that they view themselves as an equal partner within this process. Students on the PhD programme have a close relationship with their supervisors and the broader teaching team. Students are broadly free to reach out to any member of staff from academic instructors to the Vice Dean at any time. There are clear examples of changes made in response to student feedback, which are underpinned by the roll-out of a 'You said, we did' programme across the GSE and wider university. **The team identified this culture of**

integrating the student voice, and the open, supportive relationship between staff and students as an area of good practice.

3.6 NUGSE is committed to ensuring that students remain engaged and active throughout their programme. They have robust policies for Student Engagement, and it is clear from speaking to students that they understand the importance of actively engaging with their curriculum. Students meet regularly with programme directors across all programmes to identify areas that may create barriers to study. All programmes have access to a mitigating circumstances policy which includes clear procedures. There are formalised appeal routes for students who wish to appeal a range of decisions, including decisions on RPL and grades. There are also informal avenues for redress, often associated with the open-door policy with staff across a range of seniority. PhD students may fall under a dual set of regulations in relation to academic misconduct or research misconduct, but this process is clearly outlined and understood by both students and supervisors.

3.7 In conclusion, the review team confirm that **Standard 1.3 is met** with a low level of risk. There is implementation of student-centred learning and teaching across the programmes, which consist of a range of study modes, pedagogical approaches, and regular evaluation of approach and delivery. Assessments and content are up-to-date, and students understand what is expected from them and feel well supported. There is a clear culture of student voice throughout the GSE, and students feel heard and supported. There is a range of policies and procedures which support students as learners.

Standard 1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

Institutions should consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student "life cycle", e.g. student admission, progression, recognition and certification.

Findings

4.1 NUGSE has a comprehensive and consistently applied admissions policy governing the full student lifecycle, from initial application to final enrolment, providing clarity and transparency for all stakeholders. Senior leaders confirmed that fairness and consistency are priorities in operationalising admissions regulations across all GSE programmes. The admissions policy outlines the documentation required, decision-making responsibilities, and communication timelines, creating a predictable and equitable admissions environment. Meeting with the administrative staff confirmed that the process is implemented consistently through the central admissions portal.

4.2 Admissions decisions are supported by clearly defined roles and committee structures which reinforce both accountability and academic oversight. NUGSE's Admissions Committees operate under confidentiality and conflict of interest rules, ensuring that decisions are impartial and evidence based. Staff described structured meetings held at the start of each admissions cycle to calibrate interpretation of criteria and standardise evaluation procedures.

4.3 Inclusivity is embedded within the University's admissions ethos, with policy and practice encouraging applications from under-represented groups, candidates with disabilities, and international applicants. Staff and students confirmed that reasonable accommodations are provided and that applicants receive responsive support during the admissions phase. International recognition of qualifications is supported through collaboration with external agencies which verify documentation when necessary.

4.4 The multi-stage admissions structure comprising eligibility screening, shortlisting, interviewing, and final selection provides several checkpoints that mitigate inconsistencies and ensure that academic readiness is thoroughly evaluated. Staff reported that interview panels use standardised scoring rubrics tailored to programme requirements. PhD admissions are highly selective, requiring a recognised Masters degree, strong academic record, and demonstrable research potential. Admissions committees include faculty, an external School representative, and student observers in some cases, ensuring robust scrutiny of research proposals and interviews. Students confirmed that the process demanded clarity of research interests and academic readiness. They had also compared their interview experiences across several cohorts and found them to be balanced and fair. The approach ensures that admitted candidates have the capacity to progress through the rigorous doctoral milestones.

4.5 Once admitted, students benefit from comprehensive induction and orientation that introduce programme expectations, regulations, and available support systems. Students reported that orientation sessions delivered by senior faculty provide early clarity on progression requirements and academic integrity. Academic advising begins immediately after enrolment, helping new students integrate effectively into the academic community. These mechanisms collectively contribute to student preparedness and early engagement.

4.6 Progression through programmes is monitored through real-time data systems that track academic performance, assessment submissions, and engagement indicators. Early warning mechanisms flag students who require additional support, enabling timely intervention through meetings with their supervisor, Vice Dean and/or academic advisors. This proactive approach effectively supports student retention and academic success.

4.7 Progression in the PhD is structured through formal milestones including coursework completion, the qualifying examination, ethics approval, thesis proposal defence, and final thesis assessment. Faculty described clear expectations for each stage, with structured supervision, annual review processes, and specialist research training embedded throughout. Students confirmed that supervisory relationships are supportive, transparent, and strengthened by co-supervision models.

4.8 Recognition of qualifications and prior study is guided by policies aligned with the Lisbon Recognition Convention and international standards. Admissions policy for master's and PhD includes recognition of awards from other countries. Appeal mechanisms provide students with recourse where recognition decisions are disputed, reinforcing fairness and transparency. Support services assist students in navigating recognition procedures and preparing documentation, demonstrating a student-centred approach.

4.9 NU's autonomous status allows it to operate recognition processes independently from state bodies while still ensuring comparability with national and European frameworks. The university is in the final stages of approving a full Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) policy that NUGSE envisage being very useful for them in recognising both qualifications and experience of their master's and PhD students.

4.10 Certification processes are robust and comprehensive. Graduates receive trilingual diplomas (English, Russian, Kazakh) and an English-language Diploma Supplement that aligns with EHEA conventions. Alumni reported confidence that the Diploma Supplement accurately reflects learning outcomes, workload, programme structure, and qualification level. These documents support international recognition and enhance graduates' employability. The team found certification procedures both rigorous and consistently implemented.

4.11 In summary, NUGSE has comprehensive, transparent, and consistently implemented policies governing student admission, progression, recognition, and certification, and these function effectively across the master's and PhD programmes. Admissions processes are rigorous, inclusive, and well-aligned with international frameworks, and progression is supported through robust monitoring and feedback systems. Recognition and certification follow established European and Bologna standards, supporting student mobility. The review team concludes that **Standard 1.4 is met** with a low level of risk.

Standard 1.5 Teaching staff

Institutions should assure themselves of the competence of their teachers. They should apply fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and development of the staff.

Findings

5.1 NUGSE has a stated commitment to recruiting and supporting qualified academic staff capable of delivering high-quality, research-informed teaching across the GSE programmes. Recruitment and development processes are anchored in the institutional Code of Ethics, which emphasises fairness, confidentiality and non-discrimination. These processes and principles were described by senior leaders as integral to sustaining academic integrity across hiring cycles. Faculty confirmed that ethical standards are consistently upheld in practice, particularly in the treatment of international candidates and early-career academics.

5.2 All teaching staff at NUGSE meet defined academic and professional standards, ensuring that they possess the expertise required for postgraduate teaching and supervision. Evidence from faculty meetings confirmed strong engagement in research and scholarly activity, including grant applications, journal publication and curriculum innovation. Staff articulated that high quality research directly underpins their teaching, which aims to strengthen the integration of theory, methodology and field-based inquiry. Students corroborated that teaching is research-led and contemporary in focus.

5.3 Recruitment processes follow established institutional policies, including the Policy and Procedures for Hiring Faculty and the Recruitment and Selection Policy, both of which emphasise transparency and due process. Administrators reported that decisions on staff vacancies are made with consideration of enrolment trends and programme growth plans. Faculty hiring committees described multi-stage decision making that includes academic scrutiny at School and University levels.

5.4 At NU, job descriptions are updated centrally prior to each recruitment round to ensure clarity of responsibilities, expectations and required qualifications. Vacancies are widely advertised through international platforms such as Times Higher Education Jobs and Jobs.ac.uk, as well as the institutional website via Smart Recruiters. This broad outreach ensures that NU attracts the best candidates from diverse academic systems, strengthening the school's international perspective and confirming its ability to recruit globally competitive staff. International faculty described receiving timely communication and clear expectations throughout the recruitment process.

5.5 The hiring process is multi-layered, involving committee screening, structured interviews, and reference verification. Candidates interview with both the GSE Hiring Committee and the NU Hiring Committee, providing multiple opportunities to assess disciplinary expertise, teaching competence and research trajectory. Faculty involved in interviews confirmed that evaluation is guided by standardised rubrics and explicit criteria. This layered scrutiny reduces the risk of inconsistency and bias. The process is therefore both robust and fit for purpose.

5.6 Employment conditions are transparent and competitive, with faculty receiving clear terms of service covering salary, benefits and expectations for teaching and research. Staff reported that workload and expectations are clearly communicated through the Faculty Handbook and annual planning discussions with the Dean and Vice-Deans. The availability of institutional support structures, such as the Centre for Innovation in Learning and

Teaching (CILT) and the Global Relations Office, further enhances the working environment.

5.7 Teaching constitutes a substantial portion of academic workload, with 40% designated for teaching activity, ensuring that all faculty contribute meaningfully to the delivery of programmes. Faculty acknowledged that this balance (alongside 40% for research and 20% for other duties) allows sufficient time for research and support while maintaining teaching quality. Students confirmed that staff are generally accessible and responsive, suggesting that teaching loads are manageable in practice. While some concerns were raised about workload equity across Schools, the overall model appears effective and in line with other institutions.

5.8 International faculty receive extensive support from the Global Relations Office, including visa processing, relocation assistance and logistical guidance. Newly recruited staff expressed appreciation for this support, noting that it eased their transition and allowed them to focus on teaching preparation. Induction procedures are systematic and well developed. Since 2023, CILT has expanded induction provision to make it semester-long. In 2024, they introduced phased programmes spanning three months to avoid information overload. New faculty reported that these sessions effectively prepare them for teaching, assessment and use of learning technologies in the NU context. Induction materials also introduce staff to NU's pedagogical culture and student demographics.

5.9 Promotion policies at NUGSE require candidates to demonstrate university-level teaching experience, scholarly productivity and evidence of leadership aligned with expectations related to the post that they are aiming to hold. Faculty confirmed that expectations for promotion are clearly communicated and embedded in annual evaluation meetings. The emphasis on peer-reviewed publication and research impact ensures continued integration of research and teaching. Students benefit from being taught and supervised by research-active academics whose work influences national and international debates.

5.10 Professional development opportunities are available through CILT workshops, seminars and training sessions, though faculty reported that these opportunities are somewhat ad hoc and not yet codified within a structured framework. Some staff indicated that they often contribute as workshop presenters rather than beneficiaries, reducing opportunities for their own development. The lack of role-specific or needs-based training limits long-term career planning and benchmarking.

5.11 Mentorship for early-career faculty exists informally through co-teaching, peer review and supervisory pairing, but mechanisms are not formalised. Staff stated that pairing junior academics with experienced colleagues during supervision and course design is beneficial but inconsistently implemented. International teaching certification, such as all levels of UK Advance HE Fellowship is encouraged and faculty have found it useful in developing their teaching portfolio. Staff identified the benefits that they had gained from the training and compilation of portfolios for fellow, senior fellow, principal fellow and indeed associate fellowship for support staff. **The review team identified the availability to faculty and support staff of international teaching accreditation through Advance HE, offering the opportunity to gain supported opportunities for reflection on their professional practice as good practice.**

5.12 Postdoctoral scholars benefit from structured mentoring and are eligible to teach up to two courses annually, enabling them to develop teaching and research portfolios simultaneously. They participate in the University's Community of Postdoctoral Scholars, which facilitates networking and skill development. This structure has helped build a

pipeline of future faculty with strong pedagogical and research foundations. Postdocs reported satisfaction with access to development opportunities.

5.13 Teaching effectiveness is monitored through annual performance reviews, course evaluations and Committee oversight. Students confirmed that their evaluations influence course revisions and staff development discussions. Faculty acknowledged that constructive feedback contributes to reflective practice and teaching improvement. The integration of data from performance reviews in Annual Programme Monitoring strengthens the cycle of continuous enhancement.

5.14 Innovation in teaching is strongly encouraged, supported by access to Moodle, Turnitin and other platforms that facilitate blended and technology-enhanced learning. Faculty reported extensive engagement in digital pedagogy, including AI-related initiatives and co-creation with students. Teaching excellence is recognised through University-wide awards, with NUGSE consistently receiving the highest number since 2017.

5.15 In summary it is concluded that NUGSE has effective and generally well-implemented processes for recruiting, supporting and reviewing academic staff, aligned with international expectations for teaching quality. Teaching staff are appropriately qualified, research-active and committed to pedagogical excellence, supported by strong induction, transparent promotion criteria and a culture of innovation. The review team concludes that **Standard 1.5 is met** with a low level of risk.

Standard 1.6 Learning resources and student support

Institutions should have appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and ensure that adequate and readily accessible learning resources and student support are provided.

Findings

6.1 Students have access to a wide range of resources and study-spaces, including full access to the NU library. From undertaking a campus tour, the team were able to see that the library contains a range of physical and digital resources and has a large amount of group and individual study spaces. These resources are continuously updated to meet the needs of students and include a considerable number of journals and databases. PhD students are taught how to effectively utilise these resources as part of their orientation, through a dedicated library orientation. Where items are not available, students are normally able to access these through interlibrary loans via partner libraries.

6.2 Library staff offer tailored support to students throughout their studies, a service that is particularly appreciated by PhD students. The university also offers a Writing Centre with which students are able to book individual appointments to gain help with academic English writing and proof reading for their various forms of assessment and thesis preparation.

6.3 Students have access to a range of technologies and software, including specialised software for research and analysis. Moodle serves as the VLE for all programmes and includes module information, as well as wider interactive learning tools such as language learning support. Support and training for all aspects of technology needed for teaching and learning is widely available and appreciated by students. Where students are unable to afford or have difficulties accessing their own hardware, the university has a robust procedure to allow for loans of technology to ensure that students are not disadvantaged.

The team identified the extensive resources, facilities and support for students, including the addressing of digital poverty, as an area of good practice.

6.4 In relation to wider physical space, students have access to a range of teaching spaces which are equipped with smart teaching tools, alongside a variety of common areas and cafes which serve a dual purpose of providing an area for study, but also for community cohesion. This community cohesion is a strong area of NUGSE, and the wider university, with the student government providing a strong role in supporting the development of a wider student community. Students explained that in addition to the university government, the Graduate School of Education has its own mini government with sub-groups that are involved in co-ordinating trips and events. In addition, the Student Committee provides academic and administrative support and acts as a bridge between faculty and students. **The team identified the role of the student government in promoting students' interests and the wider community building activities available to students as an area of good practice.**

6.5 There were some concerns raised within the documentation around the utilisation and availability of space both for teaching and private study during busy time periods (such as when all MSc students are on campus). The team noted these concerns and recommends that NUGSE should be mindful of space implications when expanding existing programmes, and with the development of the new undergraduate programme.

6.6 Students have access to a range of pastoral support mechanisms, including informal conversations with tutors and other staff noted above, up to and including a full Health and Wellness Centre which provides medical care, psychological counselling, and guidance on

health insurance. There are excellent sports facilities on campus and a range of accommodation for students who are not based in Astana.

6.7 PhD students have access to a range of financial support mechanisms to enable them to access fieldwork or participate in conferences. Students identified how this has enabled them to grow as researchers and support their research and professional development. As noted above, PhD students spend a period of time at the University of Pennsylvania during their studies so have opportunities for international travel and study.

6.8 In conclusion, the review team confirm that **standard 1.6 is met** with a low level of risk. It is clear that there are extensive physical resources for students, which are supported by a robust technological architecture. There is support for students in accessing technology and software, as well as accessing broader 'student support' in the form of mobility and conference attendance. There are areas to monitor, such as the availability of space in light of programme developments.

Standard 1.7 Information management

Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities.

Findings

7.1 Nazarbayev University (NU) has an institutionally embedded information management framework that supports programme monitoring, decision-making and strategic planning. The Institutional Research and Analytics (IR&A) unit plays a central role in collecting and analysing data on student demographics, progression, success rates and graduate outcomes. These datasets feed into dashboards and the NU Data Digest, which inform programme-level decisions and School Quality Enhancement Reports. Programme monitoring draws on data from the Office of the Registrar and IR&A dashboards, enabling oversight of enrolment, retention, completion and academic performance. This systematic approach demonstrates strong alignment with ESG expectations for evidence-based quality assurance.

7.2 Student feedback mechanisms are integrated within the information management framework. Anonymised course evaluations and Graduate Exit Surveys are routinely collected and analysed, with outputs feeding into Annual Programme Monitoring (APM) and informing enhancement actions. The closing-the-loop process, now embedded at course, programme and School levels, ensures that student feedback is captured and acted upon, with documented communication of changes through structured reports and committee minutes.

7.3 Curriculum and programme documentation has recently been migrated to CurrlQunet, a dedicated platform for programme oversight and version control. CurrlQunet provides a single repository for programme data, supports alignment of course and programme learning outcomes and ensures transparency in approval workflows. Faculty have received training and ongoing support, and recent programme modifications have been successfully processed through the system. This development represents a significant enhancement to documentation integrity and governance.

7.4 While the framework is robust, the team noted the integration of graduate employment outcomes into programme review and enhancement is still developing. Data is collected by the Career and Advising Centre and shared through dashboards and reports. Embedding these data into APM and periodic review cycles in the long term will provide even greater assurance that programmes remain responsive to labour market needs and stakeholder expectations.

7.5 In conclusion, **Standard 1.7 is met** with a low level of risk. The school demonstrates a coherent and operationalised information management framework that supports evidence based decision making and continuous improvement. Enhancements such as the adoption of CurrlQunet and strengthened closing-the-loop processes represent important progress. The integration of graduate employment data into programme review cycles remains an area the University is continuing to develop.

Standard 1.8 Public information

Institutions should publish information about their activities, including programmes, which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to date and readily accessible.

Findings

8.1 Transparency, openness, and public access are core values of Nazarbayev University as outlined within the NU strategy. The NU website is designed for ease of navigation with information assigned to logical and appropriate headings. NUGSE has a separate website which contains specialised information in relation to the GSE programmes. The School website includes information on PhD opportunities and enables prospective applicants to make an informed decision about studying at NUGSE. From speaking to students, it is clear that they felt like they had adequate information and access to resources when deciding whether to pursue study at NUGSE, and that the process was easy and accessible.

8.2 There is regular communication of information from senior leaders to staff, students, and alumni through weekly digests. This includes school specific updates which contain relevant information for students at the GSE. Information regarding different accreditations is distributed across the GSE and NU community through regular Accreditation Newsletters. There is a range of other information publicly available to students, including data from surveys, focus groups, and other evaluation activities, and the reports that stem from these activities. Regular 'town hall' meetings happen with senior management, staff and students, allowing them to understand decisions made by senior leaders, and to seek clarity when needed.

8.3 One concern raised through these channels related to the lack of formalised teach out protocols to safeguard students' academic interests in the event of programme closures. From speaking with the leadership across programmes, it is clear that there is some level of formal teach-out plan, whereby all courses would be taught out as planned with future recruitment being stopped, and then the programme would be closed. There are university-level regulations in place to stop changes to programmes whilst students are still registered on them.

8.4 In conclusion, the team confirms that **standard 1.8 is met** with a low level of risk. Information on the School's activities is readily available for prospective and current students, and there is a range of information dissemination which enables students, staff, alumni, and other stakeholders to have an informed understanding of decisions and activities of the GSE.

Standard 1.9 Ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes

Institutions should monitor and periodically review their programmes to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of students and society. These reviews should lead to continuous improvement of the programme. Any action planned or taken as a result should be communicated to all those concerned.

Findings

9.1 Nazarbayev University (NU) has structured, cyclical arrangements for ongoing monitoring and periodic review that align with ESG expectations. Annual Programme Monitoring (APM) is the primary mechanism for programme review, drawing on student performance data, student feedback and staff reflections. These reports feed into the School Quality Enhancement Report, which is scrutinised by the NU Academic Quality Committee (AQC) and ensures institutional oversight. This escalation route provides assurance that risks and themes are identified and addressed at the appropriate level.

9.2 As noted in 1.2 above, the student voice is systematically embedded through anonymised course evaluations, Graduate Exit Surveys and representation on Programme Committees, with evidence of feedback-to-action communication. The closing-the-loop process has been strengthened since autumn 2024 and now operates at course, programme and School levels. Faculty share “You said, we did” summaries with students during class and through Moodle, and programme level reports are prepared for submission to the Learning and Teaching Committee. These developments demonstrate a clear commitment to transparency and responsiveness.

9.3 Periodic review at School level is evidenced by the Institutional Review Panel (IRP) report and its associated one-year action plan. The Graduate School of Education was the first school to go through periodic review, implementing a new university process. The comprehensive report from the panel identified a number of actions that are already being implemented. Progress against the action plan is monitored through committee structures and documented in status updates. Changes already implemented include the introduction of peer review of course syllabi and formalisation of assessment moderation processes as identified in standard 1.3. These actions reflect a systematic approach to enhancement following review recommendations.

9.4 Programme specific observations illustrate the effectiveness of these processes. For the PhD, milestone tracking provides an additional layer of assurance and informs supervisory practice. Historic evidence of substantive programme revision, such as the 2017 modification extending the programme to four years and strengthening research methods provision, illustrates responsiveness to evaluative findings.

9.5 The programme self evaluation acknowledges that structured employer and professional body engagement remains underdeveloped, limiting triangulation with labour market expectations during monitoring and review. While informal mechanisms exist, systematic integration of employer feedback into APM and periodic review cycles is not yet fully established. Planned initiatives, including employer surveys and advisory board consultations, indicate progress in this area.

9.6 In conclusion, **Standard 1.9 is met** with a low level of risk. The monitoring and review framework is coherent, operationalised and capable of driving enhancement. Strengthened closing-the-loop processes and systematic follow-up on IRP

recommendations demonstrate a mature approach to quality assurance. Further development of structured employer engagement will enhance alignment with ESG expectations.

Standard 1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance

Institutions should undergo external quality assurance in line with the ESG on a cyclical basis.

Findings

10.1 Nazarbayev University (NU) has a well defined approach to external quality assurance that aligns with ESG expectations. It has recently received institutional accreditation from the UK Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and there was evidence throughout the current programme accreditation process that actions from this had been implemented in the Graduate School of Education such as improvements to data management processes (see standard 1.7) and the implementation of the periodic review process.

10.2 The NU quality framework combines institutional and programme level external reviews with external input to programme approval and modification. As noted in standard 1.2 above, historically, the Graduate School of Education (GSE) benefited from strategic partnerships with the University of Cambridge and the University of Pennsylvania, which provided independent external review from 2013 to 2023. These partnerships supported programme development and benchmarking against international norms.

10.3 In standard 1.9 it was noted that periodic review is embedded at School level through the Institutional Review Panel (IRP) process and its associated one-year action plan, which is monitored through governance structures and documented in progress reports. For programme approval and major modification, NU requires independent external review to confirm alignment with EHEA and EQF reference points. This ensures that external perspectives inform programme design and revision activities.

10.4 Programme specific examples illustrate the impact of externality. For the PhD, the 2017 modification, which extended the programme to four years and strengthened research methods provision, reflects responsiveness to external evaluation and sector reference points.

10.5 As detailed in Section 1.1, the review team identified good practice in the strong engagement with external stakeholders, including alumni and employers, which has supported programme development and provided opportunities for collaborative research and curriculum input. This engagement demonstrates a commitment to maintaining external perspectives beyond formal review cycles.

10.6 While the Advisory Board represents a positive development, the review team recommended in Section 1.1 that GSE strengthen the systematic recording of its discussions and recommendations, noting that meeting notes should be sufficiently detailed to evidence stakeholder involvement and the impact of external input on programme enhancement. This will ensure transparency and provide assurance that external contributions are influencing decision-making.

10.7 The review team also noted that multiple action plans are generated through annual monitoring, periodic review and accreditation processes. **The review team recommends that GSE consolidates these into a single, 'live' overarching action plan document.** The current approach risks duplication and dilution of priorities, whereas a unified 'live' action plan would provide clarity, enable effective tracking and ensure that enhancement activity remains coherent and strategically aligned.

10.8 In conclusion, **Standard 1.10 is met** with a low level of risk. The external quality assurance framework is coherent and operationalised, with clear evidence of external input shaping programme design and review.

Glossary

Action plan

A plan developed by the institution after the QAA review report has been published, which is signed off by the head of the institution. It responds to the recommendations in the report and gives any plans to capitalise on the identified good practice.

Annual monitoring

Checking a process or activity every year to see whether it meets expectations for standards and quality. Annual reports normally include information about student achievements and may comment on the evaluation of courses and modules.

Collaborative arrangement

A formal arrangement between a degree-awarding body and another higher education provider. These may be degree-awarding bodies with which the institution collaborates to deliver higher education qualifications on behalf of the degree-awarding bodies. Alternatively, they may be other delivery organisations who deliver part or all of a proportion of the institution's higher education programmes.

Condition

Conditions set out action that is required. Conditions are only used with unsatisfactory judgements where the quality cannot be approved. Conditions may be used where quality or standards are at risk/continuing risk if action is not taken or if a required standard is not met and action is needed for it to be met.

Degree-awarding body

Institutions that have authority, for example from a national agency, to issue their own awards. Institutions applying to IQR may be degree-awarding bodies themselves, or may collaborate to deliver higher education qualifications on behalf of degree-awarding bodies.

Desk-based analysis

An analysis by the review team of evidence, submitted by the institution, that enables the review team to identify its initial findings and subsequently supports the review team as it develops its review findings.

Enhancement

See **quality enhancement**.

European Standards and Guidelines

For details, including the full text on each standard, see www.enqa.eu/index.php/home/esg.

Examples of practice

A list of policies and practices that a review team may use when considering the extent to which an institution meets the standards for review. The examples should be considered as a guide only, in acknowledgment that not all of them will be appropriate for all institutions.

Externality

The use of experts from outside a higher education provider, such as external examiners or external advisers, to assist in quality assurance procedures.

Facilitator

The member of staff identified by the institution to act as the principal point of contact for the QAA officer and who will be available during the review visit, to assist with any questions or requests for additional documentation.

Good practice

A feature of good practice is a process or way of working that, in the view of a QAA review team, makes a particularly positive contribution to the institution's higher education provision.

Lead student representative

An optional voluntary role that is designed to allow students at the institution applying for IQR to play a central part in the organisation of the review.

Oversight

Objective scrutiny, monitoring and quality assurance of educational provision.

Peer reviewers

Members of the review team who make the decisions in relation to the review of the institution. Peer reviewers have experience of managing quality and academic standards in higher education or have recent experience of being a student in higher education.

Periodic review

An internal review of one or more programmes of study, undertaken by institutions periodically (typically once every five years), using nationally agreed reference points, to confirm that the programmes are of an appropriate academic standard and quality. The process typically involves experts from other higher education providers. It covers areas such as the continuing relevance of the programme, the currency of the curriculum and reference materials, the employability of graduates and the overall performance of students. Periodic review is one of the main processes whereby institutions can continue to assure themselves about the academic quality and standards of their awards.

Programme of study

An approved course of study that provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification. UK higher education programmes must be approved and validated by UK degree-awarding bodies.

Quality enhancement

The process by which higher education providers systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported.

QAA officer

The person appointed by QAA to manage the review programme and to act as the liaison between the review team and the institution.

Quality assurance

The systematic monitoring and evaluation of learning and teaching, and the processes that support them, to make sure that the standards of academic awards meet the necessary standards, and that the quality of the student learning experience is being safeguarded and improved.

Recognition of prior learning

Assessing previous learning that has occurred in any of a range of contexts including school, college and university, and/or through life and work experiences.

Recommendation

Review teams make recommendations where they agree that an institution should consider developing or changing a process or a procedure in order to improve the institution's higher education provision.

Reference points

Statements and other publications that establish criteria against which performance can be measured.

Self-evaluation document

A self-evaluation report by an institution. The submission should include information about the institution as well as an assessment of the effectiveness of its quality systems.

Student submission

A document representing student views that describes what it is like to be a student at the institution, and how students' views are considered in the institution's decision-making and quality assurance processes.

Validation

The process by which an institution ensures that its academic programmes meet expected academic standards and that students will be provided with appropriate learning opportunities. It may also be applied to circumstances where a degree-awarding institution gives approval for its awards to be offered by a partner institution or organisation.

QAA3022 - R14710 - January 26

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