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Short bio: Nataliia is the NAQA Vice-Head, Global University System Fellow and Programme Leader at the London School of Business and Finance. She is a Full Professor and Doctor of Sciences, authored around 200 academic papers, including those on higher education QA. She has completed training at Harvard University, University of Bologna, University of Liverpool, and other leading HEIs. An international expert in quality assurance, she is one of the key architects of the modern Ukrainian QA system and a well-known educator and scholar. Before being elected to NAQA Board, Nataliia spent 20 years teaching and managing at universities in Ukraine, the UK, and Germany.

Paper

Title: Agility of Ukrainian Higher Education Under Martial Law: Stakeholders' Perspectives

Abstract

This paper explores how Ukrainian higher education has demonstrated agility and resilience under martial law, with perspectives from three key stakeholders: a Professor, a Student, and a Quality Assurance (QA) representative. Together, we present a multidimensional view of how institutions adapted to war, displacement, blackouts, and uncertainty.

From the Professor's perspective, we focus on the rapid digital transformation of teaching. Institutions transitioned to hybrid and online models, employing asynchronous and synchronous methods. Faculty restructured curricula for digital delivery, using cloud tools, open resources, and flexible assessments to sustain academic standards. The experience of a "professor from the trenches" (https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-62003180) illustrates how lectures continued even from the battlefield.

The Student's perspective highlights the lived experiences of learners pursuing education amid war. We explore how access to education was preserved for displaced students, those in occupied territories, and those serving in the military. The role of innovative systems in maintaining motivation and academic quality will be discussed, alongside the impact of student organizations in fostering resilience, mutual aid, and volunteerism.

The QA representative addresses how Ukraine's National QA Agency upheld standards and integrity during wartime. Key measures included remote accreditation, digital data collection, adaptive evaluation frameworks, and transparent collaboration with institutions to maintain alignment with pre-war benchmarks and ESG 2015.

This tripartite presentation underscores the collective resolve of the Ukrainian academic community. By fostering collaboration among educators, students, and QA leaders, Ukraine's higher education has not only endured wartime strain but become more adaptive—offering vital lessons for global academia in crisis contexts.

Agility of Ukrainian Higher Education Under Martial Law: A Professor's Perspective

The full-scale Russian invasion has turned Ukraine into a battlefield—militarily, intellectually, diplomatically, and culturally. Educators, professors, and students have witnessed how education has become part of this wider struggle. Once a privilege of peace, teaching has become an act of resistance and resilience. From lecture halls to online classrooms connecting displaced students across continents, Ukrainian higher education has shown remarkable agility—proving that knowledge and culture are as vital for survival as weapons and humanitarian aid.

This section offers a professor's perspective on how higher education endures under martial law. It examines efforts to continue education during war through global, diplomatic, theoretical, cultural, political, technological, and humanistic dimensions. The professor's role has evolved—becoming at once educator, diplomat, and visionary for a post-war future.

The Global Educational Front

In wartime, Ukraine's higher education is no longer confined by national borders. The conflict has accelerated global integration, narrowing the gap between Western and Ukrainian institutions. Whether studying at Harvard or Uzhhorod National University, students can access shared knowledge, online lectures, and international academic communities. Education has thus become a global front of enlightenment, with Ukraine an active and equal participant.

The agility of Ukrainian universities lies in this international collaboration. Institutions swiftly adapted curricula for online delivery, partnered with foreign universities, and launched joint programmes to

protect educational continuity. Professors now teach from shelters, exile, or diplomatic postings, maintaining academic life across borders.

Education as Diplomacy

Beyond classrooms, education now functions as diplomacy. While societies grow weary of war, learning fosters solidarity. Ukrainian policymakers promote online education not only for domestic students but also for millions displaced across Europe. Without such initiatives, Ukraine risks losing vast numbers of students and teachers to permanent migration.

From a professor's standpoint, teaching itself is diplomatic work. Each international lecture, collaboration, or conference demonstrates Ukraine's intellectual resilience. Every student who continues Ukrainian studies abroad represents victory over displacement. Educational diplomacy, therefore, is essential for preserving Ukraine's human capital during and after war.

Theoretical and Cultural Dimensions

War challenges traditional theories of knowledge. As Popper and Taleb remind us, certainty is fragile—and war exposes this daily. Concepts like patriotism are being redefined: no longer symbolic loyalty, but active contribution through teaching, volunteering, and preserving culture.

Culturally, education bridges past and future. Identity markers—language, literature, customs—are fragile in diaspora communities. Universities therefore carry a dual mission: to equip students with modern skills while safeguarding cultural memory. Every Ukrainian literature course taught abroad becomes an act of cultural survival.

Futurism, Politics, and Civilisation

Higher education under war must also look forward. It asks what follows destruction. Many students now prioritise pragmatism over idealism. Professors must restore imagination and civic purpose, reminding students that progress lies not in consumption but in knowledge, creativity, and renewal.

Politically, universities reflect both disillusionment with old elites and the scepticism of a new generation. They must cultivate critical thinking and civic responsibility to rebuild democratic life. Civilisationally, the war has blurred hierarchies. With access to global resources, Ukrainian higher education must assert itself as both European and distinctly Ukrainian—open to the world, yet rooted in national identity.

Economic, Religious, and Technological Dimensions

Economically, education no longer guarantees mobility, yet remains central to recovery. In wartime hardship, it offers stability and hope. Professors sustain motivation even when job prospects are uncertain.

Religiously, education confronts tensions between tradition and change. While dogma resists transformation, war demands moral adaptation. Professors must help students navigate questions of faith, doubt, and ethics.

Technologically, digital learning has become both necessity and opportunity. The pandemic and war together have entrenched online education as indispensable. Professors innovate continuously—creating interactive methods, sustaining human connection, and ensuring technology enhances rather than limits growth.

Humanistic and Ego-Centric Dimensions

On the humanistic level, education symbolises solidarity but also carries risk. Humanitarian initiatives and scholarships assist displaced students but can create dependency. Professors must balance compassion with empowerment, guiding students to view education as self-reliance, not relief.

At the same time, wartime learning is deeply personal. Choices about where to study or live are shaped by survival rather than collective duty. Professors must respect these realities while encouraging shared responsibility for Ukraine's future.

Teaching in Wartime: Practical Challenges and Opportunities

Teaching under martial law brings constant disruption—sirens, blackouts, unstable internet. Yet classes continue, sometimes from bomb shelters or across borders. Professors have mastered improvisation: recording lectures offline, adapting assessments, and offering flexible deadlines to support students in crisis.

War has also opened new opportunities. International universities have welcomed Ukrainian scholars and students into joint teaching programmes, fostering exchange and keeping Ukraine visible in global academia.

Education as Resistance and Renewal

For professors, agility under martial law is both professional and existential. Teaching is no longer limited to imparting knowledge—it resists erasure, sustains culture, and prepares for renewal. Education now operates on multiple fronts: global, diplomatic, cultural, technological, and humanistic. Every lesson delivered, every student retained, every degree earned under fire is a triumph of civilisation over barbarism.

The mission of Ukrainian professors is to prevent a lost generation and nurture one capable of rebuilding the nation—intellectually, culturally, and morally. Under martial law, education is not merely preparation for peace; it is a weapon of survival and a promise of victory.

Agility of Ukrainian Higher Education Under Martial Law: A Student's Perspective

The Price of Education

Russia's full-scale invasion has changed our perception of the value of the things that surround us. Among cognitive biases, *loss aversion* is one of the strongest forces in reassessing reality. Only when we stand on the verge of losing something that once seemed trivial do we truly understand the worth of even the most basic things.

Until recently, higher education felt ordinary and accessible to Ukrainian youth. Hundreds of thousands of students across Ukrainian universities were confident about tomorrow's classes, the upcoming exam session, and the need to write their future theses. Now, everything has changed. We have come to understand the real price of higher education—and of its quality—only after losing the opportunity to study at our own universities.

So, when amid military threats and constant alarms, Ukrainian students find time to read a new book, attend a lecture, or choose a thesis topic they may have to write without electricity, they know it must be meaningful. They reassess the importance of what they hear, read, think about, and ultimately write.

No Time for Poor-Quality Education

The war has magnified the issue of educational quality. Every day lived by a Ukrainian citizen is a step either towards the preservation of our nation and state, or towards their disappearance. How diligently Ukrainian students approach their studies today—and the quality of education they receive—will determine how close we are to victory tomorrow.

High-quality technical education is now an opportunity to stay ahead of the enemy in military technology and to secure leadership for the future. It is also the foundation for rebuilding our country and turning it into a technological and economic leader.

High-quality humanities and social education are equally vital. They are key to healing the deep wounds of war that scar Ukrainian society and to building a united, value-based, and cultured nation in the years to come.

When the survival of our nation and the preservation of our state are at stake, the quality of everything we do becomes a matter of life and death. To have a future, we cannot afford work of no effect now. To preserve Ukraine tomorrow, we cannot afford poor-quality education today. Because it destroys us.

Education That Wins

Each lecture lasts ninety minutes. As of September 2025, the opportunity to attend a single lecture in Lviv, Kyiv, or Odesa has cost the lives of one to five Ukrainian soldiers—and left many more wounded. The price of the next seminar or practical class will be similar.

Ukrainian students know this price. They also have the energy and determination to reduce the cost their compatriots pay for their education. They help the front line in every way possible—from volunteering and fundraising to developing new drone technologies.

Here is one of the keys to transforming Ukrainian higher education. After class, students at Kyiv Polytechnic Institute re-solder a drone's microchip so that this time it can fly through the Russian

electronic warfare zone—because the drone operator might be their former classmate. Psychology students at the Ukrainian Catholic University study trauma recovery literature, knowing that tomorrow they may need to rehabilitate the father of a friend who was captured, injured, or lost his family.

Knowing the price of war, students strive to help themselves, their friends, and their country. They take initiative, develop innovations, experiment, and put new knowledge into practice. Our task is to provide them with as many educational opportunities as possible, encourage creativity, and recognise excellence.

Quality education cannot exist without the inspiration of its seekers. Defending their country has given many students the motivation that Ukrainian education has long needed. We must preserve this enthusiasm and turn it into a lasting, proactive mindset among Ukrainian youth.

Education That Preserves Community

The destruction and upheaval caused by Russian aggression have transformed the very essence of student life in Ukraine. Students have rethought the value of their identity and the communities in which they grow as young people, citizens, and human beings. Destroyed historic university buildings and relocated campuses have become part of their reality, profoundly shaping the worldview of a generation.

Many Ukrainian students are internally displaced persons whose homes, universities, or dormitories have been occupied or destroyed by air strikes. They can no longer study together in libraries, play tennis on university courts, or share coffee in the campus café.

Yet, their connection to their universities—and the sense of belonging that comes with it—remains strong. Identifying as *"I am Mohyla," "I am from Karazin,"* or *"I am from Vasyl Stus Donetsk National University"* is a form of resistance. Even under the most difficult conditions, often without live contact with professors or classmates, educational identity continues to form—through the texts read, the code written, and the hope of one day working again in the laboratories of rebuilt campuses.

We preserve ourselves through our education.

This Is Us and This Is Our Education

At the end of last autumn, my friend and long-time colleague from the Ukrainian Student League took the GRE exam to apply to Harvard. I had the honour of writing one of his recommendation letters. He had received both a grant and a scholarship for his master's studies beginning this summer.

The only problem was that we both joined the Armed Forces of Ukraine in February 2022. Neither of us can now terminate our military service and continue our studies—whether at Harvard or in Ukrainian universities. This is not an isolated case. Yet it does not lessen our determination to remain educated people when we return to civilian life.

Ukrainian youth understand that we live on the frontier—on a civilisational border that must be defended. But if we want our citizens to thrive, we must also nurture self-improvement and education.

Numerous Ukrainian student organisations continue to foster the culture of student life, seeking new academic and professional opportunities. National student unions work to strengthen student self-governance—a key component of higher education quality in Ukraine.

If we cannot yet study at the world's leading universities, our task is to ensure that knowledge gained at Ukrainian universities meets global standards. In a turbulent world, to be competitive we must care for our own education system. This is our challenge—and our responsibility.

Agility of Ukrainian Higher Education Under Martial Law: The National QA Agency Perspective

The Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 created one of the most severe disruptions in European higher education. Campuses were destroyed or occupied, millions of students and academics displaced, and entire academic communities forced to survive under fire. Within this chaos, the National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance (NAQA) faced a unique challenge. As Ukraine's sole accreditation body, it had to maintain academic standards and preserve public trust at a time when the system's very survival was uncertain.

This section explores NAQA's perspective on agility under martial law—how it adapted procedures, supported its expert network, prioritised safety, and upheld education as a foundation of national

resilience. Its response provides lessons in quality assurance and crisis leadership relevant to higher education systems facing conflict or systemic disruption.

Immediate Adaptation: Crisis Leadership in Action

Founded in 2019, NAQA had already endured the global COVID-19 pandemic, which fostered a culture of digitalisation and flexibility. These experiences prepared it for wartime crisis management. Effective leadership, as NAQA demonstrated, depends on early recognition, transparent communication, and measured optimism.

From the invasion's first days, NAQA's network of more than 5,000 experts became a lifeline, ensuring continuity despite blackouts, displacement, and bombardment. The agency communicated internationally, issued statements affirming its mission, reassured institutions, and quickly introduced legal and procedural changes suited to martial law conditions.

Adjusting Quality Assurance Procedures

Traditional accreditation—onsite visits, documentation checks, compliance verification—became unfeasible in many regions. NAQA therefore launched delayed accreditation: a simplified one-year procedure for institutions whose campuses were damaged, occupied, or destroyed. This protected students by maintaining diploma validity, allowed institutions to reorganise and relocate without losing status, preserved Ukraine's reputation within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and alignment with ESG 2015 standards.

NAQA also refocused evaluation priorities. In place of physical audits, it emphasised teaching continuity, digital capacity, and institutional resilience. Flexibility did not mean leniency but recognised that survival itself was a form of excellence.

Training Experts for Wartime Realities

Quality assurance under bombardment required new skills. NAQA trained experts not only in academic evaluation but also in crisis-sensitive assessment. Webinars and workshops prepared evaluators for online accreditation in disrupted settings, for verifying alternative evidence when data had been lost, and for communicating empathetically with traumatised staff and students.

Training also addressed technical and safety issues—managing blackouts, pausing reviews during air raids, and documenting interruptions transparently. This human-centred approach reflected NAQA's guiding principle: that quality assurance must protect people as well as standards.

Ensuring Security and Empathy in QA Procedures

Security became integral to evaluation ethics. NAQA affirmed that participant safety outweighed procedural efficiency. Institutions could reschedule accreditation meetings due to blackouts or missile alerts, and most site visits shifted to hybrid or online formats.

These measures were not treated as compromises but as acts of solidarity. Evaluators were urged to approach institutions with sensitivity, recognising the mental toll of war. By coupling rigour with empathy, NAQA embodied crisis leadership grounded in humanity and trust.

The Strategic Value of Higher Education in Wartime

NAQA consistently highlighted that high-quality higher education is essential for national survival. Universities are more than learning centres: they are pillars of community resilience, carriers of cultural identity, and engines of post-war reconstruction. By maintaining standards and recognition, NAQA directly supported Ukraine's security and recovery.

Quality assurance thus became an act of resistance**.** Upholding Ukrainian diplomas signalled that the nation's intellectual sovereignty remained intact. Higher education served as both shield—protecting students' rights—and tool—equipping society with the knowledge needed to rebuild and prevail.

Leadership and International Collaboration

Crisis leadership depends on communication, innovation, and coalition-building. NAQA demonstrated all three. Through regular updates, social media, and webinars, it kept stakeholders informed and engaged. It developed new IT systems for remote accreditation and data management.

International collaboration with partner agencies, ENQA, and CEENQA brought material support and moral reinforcement. Global solidarity validated Ukraine's efforts and integrated its quality assurance

community more deeply into the European framework. In this way, NAQA turned vulnerability into opportunity for international cooperation.

Challenges and Ethical Dilemmas

Despite success, NAQA confronted serious challenges. Ensuring fairness in accreditation was complex: how could institutions in safer western regions be compared with those under bombardment in the east? Should universities in occupied territories retain accreditation if they could no longer operate under Ukrainian law?

Frequent blackouts disrupted evaluation sessions; many meetings resumed from bomb shelters. NAQA managed these realities through flexibility but acknowledged the limits of normal procedures in wartime. Yet, by prioritising safety, fairness, and transparency, the agency reaffirmed trust and modelled ethical leadership consistent with ESG principles.

From Survival to Renewal

Wartime innovations became seeds for long-term reform. Hybrid and online site visits, flexible accreditation frameworks, and stakeholder-centred training are likely to remain features of a modernised post-war QA system. NAQA's agility has laid the groundwork for a more resilient, inclusive, and internationally connected model of quality assurance.

Thus, while born of necessity, NAQA's adaptations have accelerated transformation. By treating survival as leadership, the agency has turned crisis into a catalyst for modernisation.

Conclusion

The experience of Ukraine's National QA Agency demonstrates how quality assurance can serve as both regulator and lifeline during national crisis. Through procedural flexibility, expert training, safety prioritisation, and international collaboration, NAQA sustained the credibility of Ukrainian higher education under martial law.

Most importantly, NAQA underscored the strategic role of education in wartime: to preserve identity, empower citizens, and prepare the ground for recovery and victory. This fusion of quality assurance and crisis leadership offers a model not only for Ukraine's reconstruction but also for global higher education systems confronting conflict and disruption.

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