KSE Undergraduate Model for Wartime Recovery

Responding to Disrupted Education, Empowering Ukraine's Future Leaders

Kyiv School of Economics
Undergraduate Studies Department
2020–2025

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Foreword

On Saturday, August 15, 2020, I accepted an offer to join the Kyiv School of Economics (KSE) with a mission to establish its first undergraduate programs. What began as the ambitious task of launching these programs soon evolved into the tremendous endeavor of nurturing their growth and scaling their impact. Four and a half years later, as I write these lines, KSE proudly offers eight undergraduate programs, enrolling 570 students and supported by a distinguished faculty of over 130 members and teaching assistants. The three longest-standing programs have recently earned international accreditation, and in the summer of 2025, we will celebrate the graduation of the first undergraduate cohort.

This report is dedicated to the fundamental principles and processes that have shaped the undergraduate programs at KSE, chronicling their journey from vision to reality. What is written in this text is a tribute to the unwavering dedication, intellectual rigor, and tireless efforts of more than 150 remarkable individuals who have been working diligently to build and refine these programs. Notably, it honors the extraordinary commitment of the academic directors' team, whose leadership and perseverance have been instrumental in shaping the undergraduate experience. I have had the profound privilege of leading this team, drawing endless inspiration from their passion and resolve.

Building something entirely new is always a formidable endeavor, but inspiring trust in what does not yet exist — believing in a vision that will take years to manifest — is an even greater challenge. I extend my deepest gratitude to our students and their families for embracing this vision, believing in us, and entrusting us with their aspirations and ambitions.

I am also especially grateful to Alexandra Vacroux, Vice President for Strategic Engagement at KSE, whose thoughtful reading of the draft and constructive feedback helped sharpen the clarity of this report.

Above all, I sincerely thank the President of KSE, Tymofiy Mylovanov, whose steadfast trust and resolute support were pivotal when credibility was still being earned. His unwavering belief in our mission, his refusal to impose limits even when prudence might have suggested otherwise, and his relentless commitment to securing the necessary resources for KSE and its undergraduate programs have been extraordinary. For all this — and for his continued dedication — I am profoundly grateful.

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Summary

This report chronicles the establishment and evolution of undergraduate programs at the Kyiv School of Economics (KSE) from 2020 to the beginning of 2025 — a period marked by rapid institutional growth, educational innovation, and a steadfast commitment to teaching excellence. In under five years, KSE transformed a bold academic vision into a robust system encompassing eight undergraduate programs, 570 enrolled students, and a faculty team of over 130 members and teaching assistants. Graduating the first cohort in the summer of 2025 is a milestone of this journey.

The report consists of six main sections. The first one outlines the programs' key structural and pedagogical features and explains how each responds to the concrete needs of incoming students. The second section focuses on forming a culture of academic integrity and the mechanisms used to support and enforce it. The third section reviews the evolution of admission strategies across four admission campaigns and analyzes retention challenges. The fourth section details the multistage process of hiring faculty and the tools for expanding the candidate pool. The fifth describes faculty development practices, including onboarding, mentorship, training, and performance evaluation. The final section presents the quality assurance cycles at KSE, which are used to monitor and continuously improve course and program delivery.

The design of undergraduate programs at KSE has been shaped by the specific learning needs of Ukrainian high school graduates. These needs have, in turn, been defined by systemic challenges in secondary education over the past five years — including a sharp decline in learning skills, erosion of subject knowledge, and the normalization of academic dishonesty, especially during the pandemic and the full-scale war. KSE responded to these challenges by building a model rooted in active student engagement, personalization and flexibility, and academic integrity. Core features include an emphasis on active engagement — with practical sessions far outweighing lectures and peer tutoring schemes enhancing student support — and a grading culture built around personalized, timely feedback rather than numerical scores alone. Small student groups and team-based course delivery reinforce these strategies, ensuring attention to every student. Since 2022, flipped classrooms have been introduced and scaled: 17 of the largest courses operate in this model, supported by over 100 hours of thematic video content, with 75–95% of students engaging with materials prior to each class session. Flexibility is further enhanced through mechanisms such as transfer from one degree to another (utilized by 12% of students annually), testing out of courses through early examinations (13% of the 2024 cohort), credit transfer and recognition of prior learning from both formal and non-formal sources (over 15% of students in 2023–2024), and the option to shape individual learning paths through electives (25–35% of the curriculum) and minors (introduced in 2024). These approaches allow students to pursue their academic development at an appropriate pace and depth while acquiring the learning skills and autonomy necessary for long-term success. More on this can be found in the Key Features of Undergraduate Programs section.

At the same time, cultivating a culture of academic integrity has been a cornerstone of the undergraduate experience. Recognizing that students often arrive without any prior exposure to integrity as a value, KSE launched a foundational onboarding course where students reflect on past dishonest behaviors, study institutional policies, and discuss systemic causes and prevention strategies. The 2022 adoption of a formal Academic Integrity Code enabled consistent rules enforcement. Over the past two years, 230 cases have been processed. Most were resolved through a simplified procedure, in which the instructor and student mutually acknowledge that a violation occurred and agree on an appropriate sanction. More severe or disputed cases were referred to a formal review committee that includes student representation. We have been successful in inculcating the university's values through the first-year program; by the end of the first year, most students actively support and uphold the culture of academic integrity. Further details are provided in the Academic Integrity section.

Our admissions campaigns have consistently targeted strong and motivated students. KSE undergraduate programs have risen into the top 5 in Ukraine by average admission scores since 2023. The state has recognized the quality of KSE by increasing the number of publicly funded scholarships (state-funded places) awarded to the university each year since 2022 — from 23 in the first year to 73 in 2024. Recruitment efforts evolved from ad hoc individual advising to a professional Admissions office and later to a student-led Ambassadors Program that reaches out young talents. Still, retention remains a key concern: 20–35% of students withdraw or are expelled after the first year, primarily due to academic underperformance linked to the weak school preparation system. KSE has responded by using more selective admission thresholds and more precise targeting. The preliminary results are visible: in 2024, failure rates in foundational mathematical courses dropped by over five percentage points compared to the previous year. See the Student Recruitment and Retention section for more information.

Faculty recruitment involves a five-stage process, including trial classes. Between 2021 and 2024, 112 faculty and 96 teaching assistants were hired. KSE launched innovative tools such as the PodCampus podcast to attract candidates aligned with institutional values. Faculty members participate in an onboarding course and receive ongoing mentorship, monitoring, and performance evaluations. Students evaluate teaching quality mid-course and after course completion. In the 2023–2024 academic year, across all subjects, faculty members received average scores ranging from 7.9 to 8.8 out of 10 across all evaluation parameters. Faculty selection and development are discussed in Faculty Recruitment and Faculty Development.

Quality assurance at KSE is built on multi-level PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) cycles. A fast feedback loop enables course improvements mid-trimester based on student surveys and class monitoring. A course-level iterative cycle revises course design from one offering to the next. At the program level, student feedback, faculty reflective reviews, internship evaluations, and academic mobility reports inform major adjustments. As of 2024, three undergraduate programs have received international accreditation from the German agency ZEvA, which recognized the quality assurance

system as professional and comprehensive. The system is described in the section Quality Management Cycles of Undergraduate Programs.

In sum, the development of undergraduate programs at KSE represents a systemic, adaptive, and data-informed model of reform. The strategies described in this report are particularly relevant to policymakers, university leaders, and educators considering the future of undergraduate education in Ukraine. These approaches have effectively addressed growing secondary and higher education challenges — including learning gaps, academic dishonesty, and the erosion of learning skills. Unfortunately, these problems are likely to deepen in the coming years due to ongoing disruptions in the school system. As such, KSE's experience offers a practical response and a scalable model that can inform the broader transformation of Ukrainian higher education.

Key Features of KSE Undergraduate Programs

KSE undergraduate programs are tailored for students who are hard-working, have an above-average or high level of knowledge, are goal-oriented, and demonstrate social engagement. Program design also takes into account several external challenges:

- Research indicates that violations are widespread in Ukraine's education system (OECD)[1], where cheating, plagiarism, contract cheating[2], and most recently unauthorized AI use have become normalized, especially after the shift to remote learning due to COVID-19 and the full-scale invasion. As a result, many newly admitted undergraduate students come from a culture where academic integrity is not regarded as a core value but is widely tolerated in its violation. Academic integrity is essential for quality education and serves as the foundation of a university. Given the fundamental significance of academic integrity, we will explore it in greater detail in a dedicated separate section below.
- The most common skill deficit is not in subject-specific knowledge of mathematics or language (which can be compensated by students willing to make an effort). The bigger problem lies in learning skills like self-regulation and time management, the ability to concentrate and shift focus effectively, efficient reading and processing of information (including note-taking), and the ability to prepare for tasks and complete them independently or with minimal instructions. These skills have not been adequately developed in secondary education over the past five years, due to remote learning or, in some extreme cases, the complete absence of formal education for weeks or even months.
- The overall level of subject knowledge among students is declining, and more importantly, it has become increasingly diverse and fragmented. Within the same cohort, there may be stark differences in proficiency across subjects.
- Applicants at 17 do not always understand what they want to study and in which direction to build their future careers. After the first year of study, students better understand their needs and desires better and what they can gain from different areas of knowledge.

To address these challenges, the undergraduate programs team developed a high level of individualization and student engagement in the learning process.

[1] OECD (2017), OECD Reviews of Integrity in Education: Ukraine 2017, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264270664-en.
[2] Contract cheating is a type of academic misconduct where students hire someone else to do their assignment for them

Active engagement

Active engagement as a teaching method based on empirically proven techniques (Dehaene 185)[3]. Moreover, active engagement is particularly effective in teaching students who lack well-developed learning skills. Therefore, active engagement is at the core of the learning process in KSE undergraduate programs. Practical sessions significantly outnumber lectures, and assessments are frequent and distributed rather than relying on one or two high-stakes assignments. Tasks emphasize the practical application of acquired knowledge and skills. Various interactive methods, such as group assignments, projects, real-world case studies, role-playing exercises, peer feedback tasks, and self-assessments, are systematically integrated into the learning process.

Active engagement facilitates a deeper acquisition of subject knowledge and skills and, more importantly, fosters the development of learning skills. After a year in undergraduate programs, KSE students who participated in academic mobility programs to Western universities with more traditional lecture-based approaches and grades dependent on final exams demonstrated high academic performance due to well-developed learning skills. A similar effect is observed when undergraduate students take courses alongside master's students in KSE.

Despite its clear benefits, active engagement presents one significant challenge — it imposes a considerably higher workload on faculty members than traditional teaching methods. Therefore, it is crucial to continuously deploy best practices for optimizing teaching workload (without compromising quality), including using AI tools.

As a part of the active engagement approach, undergraduate programs feature a peer tutoring program, where students with stronger performance in English and mathematics and programming mentor those facing academic challenges. This initiative helps students improve academic performance and promotes collaboration among students. At the same time, tutoring demands certain supervision to avoid tutors being used for course assignments.

Feedback

Grades, even when assigned based on clear and transparent grading rubrics (a mandatory element in undergraduate programs), have a somewhat limited educational effect. Low grades can even lead to negative consequences, mainly because grades are often used as punishment in the Ukrainian secondary school system. As a result, a significant number of students develop stress-related sensitivities, and some even experience specific syndromes such as math anxiety.

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[3] Dehaene, Stanislas. How We Learn: Why Brains Learn Better than Any Machine ... for Now. Viking, 2020.

For this reason, KSE undergraduate programs prioritize feedback over grades. The grading rubric serves not only as a tool for assigning scores but also as a foundation for meaningful feedback. The primary goal of feedback is not merely to justify a grade but to recognize strengths, highlight key weaknesses, and explain alternative approaches or improvements in completing assignments. The value of feedback diminishes the longer it takes to be delivered, so undergraduate programs emphasize providing it as early as possible. However, the demanding workload of faculty members sometimes makes this challenging.

Providing feedback is a labor-intensive process, so strategies to help faculty manage this workload are discussed during onboarding and faculty training. One approach is collective feedback with discussion elements, where common mistakes and best practices are reviewed in class. Another strategy involves using pre-prepared feedback templates, as most students tend to make similar mistakes. These methods help maintain high-quality feedback while managing instructor workload effectively.

Small Groups

To ensure that active engagement is effective, students must receive sufficient individual attention. That is why undergraduate programs limit the size of practical or discussion groups to 15–25 students, depending on the subject. These small-group sessions are typically led by faculty or teaching assistants. Reducing group size naturally increases the total number of sessions required, which in turn demands a larger instructional team and closer coordination among faculty and teaching staff.

KSE undergraduate programs have teaching teams of two to six educators per course, ensuring a high level of student engagement and teaching quality. To maintain consistency in teaching, faculty and teaching assistants receive onboarding and training that address common forms of misalignment — such as inconsistent grading or lack of coordination between lectures and practical sessions. These sessions introduce team-teaching strategies to improve coordination and coherence across groups.

Flipped Classrooms

Since 2022, undergraduate programs have implemented the flipped classroom approach, maximizing the benefits of active engagement. Under this model, students are required to study certain materials before class, while classroom time is dedicated to applying and reinforcing what they have learned.

The initial experience with this approach revealed that some students, due to insufficient self-discipline, did not engage with the materials independently. Although these students were in the minority, it became clear that additional incentives were needed to improve engagement. In 2023, as undergraduate programs scaled up — tripling the number of students — the number of practical sections per course increased from 2-3 to 6-9, while lectures expanded to 3-4 groups of up to 90 students each. Since existing classroom

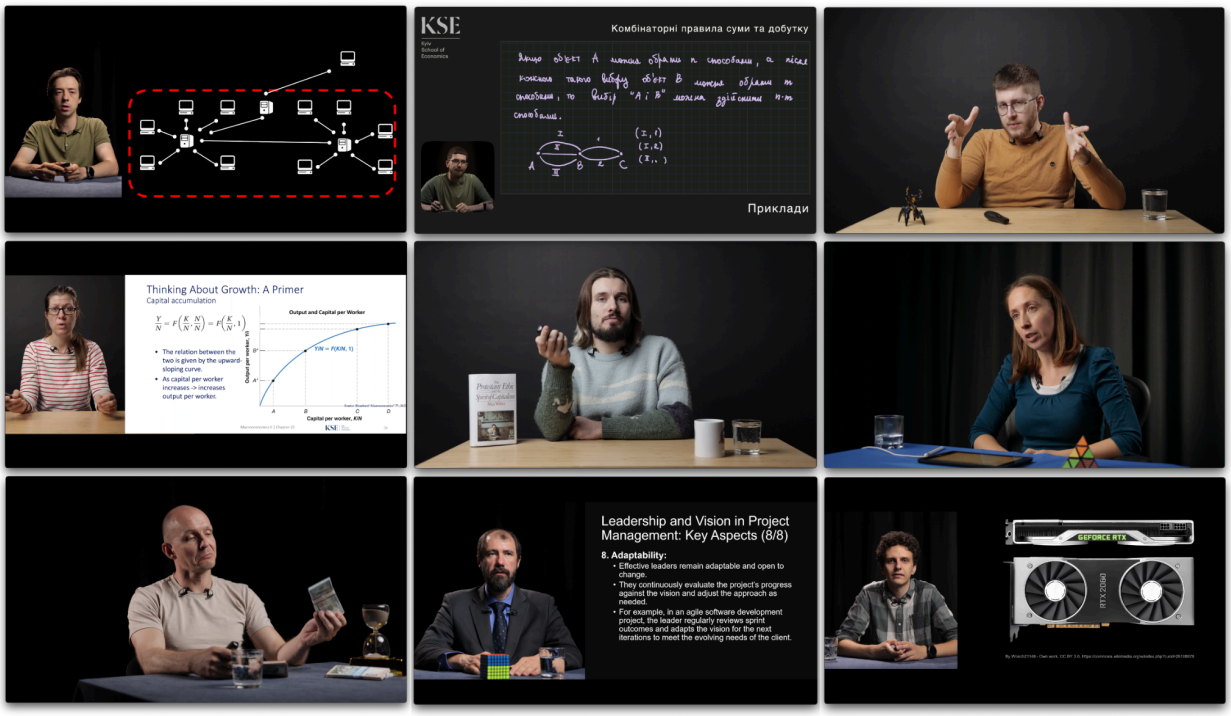
facilities could not accommodate such large lectures, undergraduate programs began phasing out the traditional lecture format.

The material previously covered in lectures was restructured into short, professionally recorded thematic videos. Students watch these videos at their convenience, review supplementary materials, and then attend in-person sessions focused on applying what they have learned through discussions, problem-solving, or other practical activities. This shift allows faculty to dedicate more time during the course to practical exercises and to address individual student inquiries during office hours. Depending on the subject, the number of practical sessions each student attends increased by 10–30% to allow for more in-depth practice and engagement.

Monitoring how many students engage with the videos before class remains crucial. Currently, 75–95% of students watch the assigned videos, which is a higher percentage than traditional lecture attendance.

In total, 17 of the largest courses in undergraduate programs have been adapted to this format. As of January 2025, we had produced 348 thematic video lectures with a combined runtime of over 101 hours. If delivered in a traditional lecture format, these lessons would have taken 340 hours — more than three times longer. As a result, students now receive instructional content that they can master in less time and at their own pace, while classroom time is used more effectively for hands-on learning.

Stills from Videos for KSE Undergraduate Programs



Transfer of Credits

KSE undergraduate programs recognize credits obtained both in formal and non-formal education systems. Grades earned at foreign universities (Bocconi, UMass, NYU Prague, UConn, etc.), as well as in study completed at Ukrainian universities (NaUKMA, KNU, UCU) can be transferred to KSE. For grades to be counted for KSE credit, the academic director of the student's program inspects course syllabi and assignments completed during the course. Grades are not automatically recognized for KSE credit. In some cases, students are asked to take extra exams or complete assignments assessed by KSE faculty. Between October 2023 and November 2024, more than 70 students in undergraduate programs received KSE credit for courses taken at other universities.

Early Course Completion

As previously mentioned, students in undergraduate programs may have significantly different levels of prior knowledge. For those with the highest level of expertise, an option exists to take an early exam. If they successfully pass the test, they can test out of the course requirement and receive credit in advance. This practice is common for first-year courses such as Introduction to Mathematics and English. For instance, approximately 40 students (13%) from the 2024 cohort passed early exams. Some students use the freed-up time to take elective courses as early as their first year.

Transferring to a different KSE Program

Students in undergraduate programs can switch freely between programs. For example, among the 2023 cohort, 30 students changed their program during their first year of study, six re-enrolled in a different program in the summer after their first year, and two more switched programs in their second year. As a result, approximately 12% of students seamlessly transitioned to a program better suited to their interests. Academic directors create individualized learning trajectories for such students to help them bridge learning gaps and catch up with their new program peers without excessive workload. Most program transfers occur during the first year, though there are cases of students switching even in their third year.

Electives

As students progress in their program and fulfill core requirements, they gain greater flexibility to shape their own learning trajectory through an increasing number of elective courses. Consequently, 25% to 35% of courses are selected by students. Students may choose among all courses offered across all university programs, ensuring the broadest possible opportunities to pursue diverse academic interests. To facilitate informed decision-making, we provide students with course syllabi or brief descriptions (if the syllabus is not yet finalized at the time of selection) and a planned course schedule.

Holding faculty presentations during the selection process in the future would further enhance the ability to make well-informed decisions.

After the start of classes, students are given two weeks to drop courses. This is considered relatively liberal compared to standard practices at most Ukrainian universities. As a result, many students initially enroll in more courses than they plan to take and later drop those that least meet their expectations or create scheduling conflicts.

In 2024, undergraduate programs introduced minors system, allowing students to develop expertise in a specific subfield within their program by following a structured selection of 4-6 elective courses. Each program offers at least three such minors. This approach helps students plan their course selection more systematically, investing their time with a clear focus on a defined professional role or industry domain.

Academic integrity

Academic integrity is a fundamental ethical component of the academic world. It is a necessary if not sufficient condition for quality, it is therefore a necessary foundation for building a university. Studies show that academic integrity violations are widespread in the Ukrainian education system. In both schools and universities, a system has developed in which integrity breaches are tolerated and sometimes even encouraged. Cheating on exams, contract cheating, plagiarism, and the unauthorized use of AI tools have become everyday habits for students, particularly after the transition to remote learning due to COVID-19 and the full-scale invasion. In undergraduate programs, this has led to a situation where the prevailing culture among newly admitted students tolerates violations of academic integrity. Under such conditions, formal rules on academic integrity would be ineffective. Therefore, since 2021, the undergraduate program team has been actively working on changing the student culture in this regard.

As part of the onboarding course “How to Study at KSE”, students participate in sessions where they explore why they cheat, familiarize themselves with the concept of academic integrity and its components, and discuss the collective and personal benefits of maintaining integrity. To better understand the underlying causes, students write anonymous essays about their own experiences, reflecting on why they have engaged in dishonest practices. Common reasons include high parental expectations, pressure to impress classmates, lack of confidence in their own abilities, excessive workload, poor teaching quality, and even encouragement from teachers to violate academic standards.

During the course, faculty analyze these responses together with students and discuss strategies to address them. Some sessions focus on methods to reduce anxiety and build confidence, while others explore university policies that help prevent student overload or ensure teaching quality. Additional sessions in “How to Study at KSE” are dedicated to studying the Academic Integrity Code, where faculty explains the different types of violations, the procedures for handling them, and the potential sanctions. Students also receive instruction on proper citation practices to prevent unintentional plagiarism.

This process introduces students to a new system of academic values. A small number immediately embrace it, an even smaller fraction reject it outright, but the majority take a wait-and-see approach, wanting to observe how it functions in practice before fully committing to it.

Daily practice is the key to developing a strong culture of academic integrity. The undergraduate program team employs a comprehensive and consistent approach, ensuring that academic values are upheld at all levels. If values are applied selectively, they cease to be values.

As previously mentioned, one of the major causes of academic dishonesty is poor course design. Unclear grading rubrics, vague assignment instructions, insufficient time

to master course material, assignments that fail to support or assess learning outcomes, and ambiguous course objectives all contribute to a lack of academic integrity. To support effective course design, academic directors and the dean provide guidance and collaborate with faculty — particularly during initial syllabus and assignment development — to ensure alignment with program goals and student needs. They help calculate an optimal workload that considers students' commitments to other courses, assist in developing clear and structured grading rubrics, and ensure that assignments are properly aligned with learning outcomes. The goal is to design tasks that accurately measure students' knowledge and skills.

In undergraduate programs, multiple-choice tests are rarely used. Well-designed multiple-choice tests require extensive development and validation. Even then, their ability to reliably measure deep understanding can be limited due to the potential for correct answers to be selected by chance. Special attention is also given to assignments where AI tools are restricted. Such tasks are designed in a way that makes AI use impractical and of little benefit. After several trimesters of experience, an AI class policy was developed to integrate AI to enhance learning while minimizing its abuse.

However, good course design alone is not enough to ensure that students fully understand expectations. For this reason, the first class sessions in most courses are dedicated to a collective reading of the syllabus, where students can ask clarifying questions. This approach helps them better understand their workload, plan their studies effectively, and reduce stress associated with uncertainty about course requirements.

The culture of academic integrity depends on how consistently violations are detected by faculty and inevitably lead to consequences. For this reason, undergraduate programs, especially during the first year of study, enforce comprehensive integrity checks for issues such as plagiarism, cheating, and unauthorized AI use.

Given the large number of assignments students complete, this process is largely automated using specialized plugins and subscription-based verification services. However, tools such as AI or plagiarism detectors are known to occasionally produce false positives, particularly in the case of AI-generated content detection. At KSE's undergraduate programs, such tools are used as preliminary indicators rather than definitive proof of misconduct. When a potential issue is flagged, the faculty reviews the case personally — often by engaging the student in follow-up questions to assess their understanding and authorship of the assignment. Once a suspected violation is identified, the student either accepts the typical sanction (usually receiving zero points for the assignment) or the case is forwarded to the Academic Integrity Committee for review.

Initially, the integrity accountability system operated ad hoc, where faculty, the academic director, and the dean would convene as needed to review individual cases. However, as the number of students grew and experience accumulated, it became clear that a more structured approach was necessary. This led to the formalization of processes, culminating in the development of the Academic Integrity Code at the end of 2022.

The Code outlines types of violations, procedures for review, types of sanctions, and the appeals process. Notably, it covers violations committed by both students and faculty. The review process includes a simplified procedure for cases where the student admits the violation. In this case, the student and the faculty electronically sign a joint statement detailing the circumstances and agreeing on the appropriate sanction. If a student does not admit to the violation. A committee is formed to review information from both the faculty and the student before deciding whether a violation occurred and, if so, what the consequences should be. The committee must include a student who has no conflicts of interest. Student participation in the committee fosters a culture of academic integrity, as those found in violation see that they are held accountable not only by the administration but also by their peers.

Over the two years since the formalized procedure was introduced in undergraduate programs, 170 joint statements (simplified procedure) have been recorded, and the Academic Integrity Committee has reviewed 60 cases. The most common sanction under the joint statement procedure has been a zero score for the assignment in which the violation occurred.

Decisions made by the committee were distributed as follows:

- In 10% of cases, the committee concluded that no violation of academic integrity had occurred.
- 42% of cases resulted in a zero or negative score for the assignment in question.
- 30% of cases led to a zero score for the entire course.
- 17% of cases resulted in expulsion, most often in situations where a student had committed an integrity violation for the third time.

Most students who commit a violation once do not repeat it.

Reinforcing academic integrity at every stage of learning means that most undergraduate students fully embrace these principles by the end of their first year and actively uphold a culture of academic integrity.

Student Recruitment and Retention

As mentioned above, the design of undergraduate programs is aimed at students who are willing to put effort into their studies, have above-average or high academic performance, are goal-oriented, and demonstrate social engagement. Admission to undergraduate programs in Ukraine is based entirely on the results of a centralized national exam, with no consideration of essays, recommendation letters, or extracurricular achievements. Universities have no influence over the test content or the scores applicants receive. Students take the National Multi-Subject Test (NMT) at the end of secondary school (11th grade), which includes Ukrainian language, mathematics, history of Ukraine and a fourth subject of the student's choice — typically a foreign language, biology, physics, or chemistry. From the outset, the KSE undergraduate programs team has aimed to attract applicants with the highest entrance scores. In 2021, based on the average scores of admitted students, three undergraduate programs ranked in the top20 among more than 100 universities with similar programs. By 2022, KSE had already reached the top 10. Since 2023, undergraduate programs have consistently ranked in the top 5 based on the average entrance scores of admitted students.

KSE Undergraduate Programs National Ranking by the Average Score of Admitted Students

Programs	2021	2022	2023	2024
Economics and Big Data (EBD)	14	1	1	1
Business Economics (BE)	8	5	3	3
Software Engineering (SE)	11	7	5	4
Cyber Security (CS)			2	1
Artificial Intelligence (AI)			3	2
Applied Math (AM)			2	2
Law (LAW)			4	4
Psychology (PS)			3	3

2021

KSE accepted its first undergraduate students (to three programs) in 2021. The admissions campaign faced a number of challenges. KSE had no undergraduates (or alumni), no government scholarships for top students, no accreditation, and no established reputation. Moreover, private universities are generally seen as less reputable than traditional universities. The admissions campaign was based on the

principle of maximum transparency and the proactive search for applicants who best fit these programs. The BA team handled legal aspects (obtaining a license, approving admission rules), conducted a series of presentations in schools and open days, arranged media coverage, engaged opinion leaders to encourage applicants, and provided individual support to each applicant. As a result, 92 students were admitted: 52 to Business Economics, 22 to Economics and Big Data, and 18 to Software Engineering and Business Analytics.

2022

For the 2022 campaign, we established a separate Admissions office responsible for recruiting students to both BA and MA programs. Student recruitment is a highly specific task, differing significantly from selling other services and products. It requires individuals who can develop the necessary skills on the job. Admissions team had to create a strategy and roadmap, organize events, maintain ongoing and proactive communication with leads, and manage the general communication campaign across media and social networks.

In November 2021, academic directors and program managers developed a desired applicant profile for each undergraduate and master's program. In December 2021, the first open day for prospective students was held. Unfortunately, the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine halted the recruitment campaign for two months. Many of our leads fled abroad and were lost. The 2022 admission campaign restarted in May and lasted only four months. Despite this, we enrolled 93 students (53 in Business Economics, 16 in Economics and Big Data, 24 in Software Engineering) as well as 97 students across our Master's programs. Undergraduate program intake remained at the 2021 level, while master's program enrollment increased by 40%. In 2022, the Kyiv School of Economics (KSE) received state-funded places for the first time.

2023

The 2023 campaign began with a review of the previous admissions campaign (data analysis combined with a survey of both enrolled students and some who declined admission). We set a new recruitment target of 300 students (a 50% increase from the previous year). Numerous events were held between December 2022 and May 2023, including Open Days, career guidance workshops, and preparatory courses. By May 2023, these efforts had generated over 800 leads, of whom 111 were ultimately admitted.

In May 2023, during the ongoing admission campaign, the KSE leadership significantly raised its enrollment target. To support this more ambitious goal, an external agency was engaged to design and implement a social media and outdoor advertising campaign. The Admissions increased the number of recruitment events and expanded content to cover new programs. It also established and launched a call center to ensure intensive engagement with applicants throughout the campaign. In addition, the

Admissions collaborated with the KSE Charitable Foundation to create and distribute two types of financial support: merit-based academic grants for top-ranked students and need-based aid for children of soldiers and internally displaced persons. In August 2023, we admitted 351 undergraduates and 205 master's students for a total of 556.

2024

The 2024 admission campaign was conducted by a new Admissions team, which focused on broad outreach without targeting a students best suited for KSE programs. In March 2024, a new Ambassadors Program was launched to target top high school students. The goal was to increase the number of high-achieving students, enhancing the university's reputation and creating a sustainable recruitment model. The program selects ambassadors from current students through a competitive application process, evaluating their persuasiveness, social media influence, and networks. Selected ambassadors undergo training on outreach strategies before engaging in school visits, national Olympiads, and youth organization partnerships. They establish personal connections with potential applicants, guiding them through the admission process and offering experience-based recruitment activities. The university supports ambassadors with travel, accommodation, and event materials.

In 2024, ambassadors helped enroll 66 students with an average score of 178, which was higher than the average score of 172. Additionally, ambassadors built a contact base of over 400 talented high schoolers from grades 8-11.

State-Funded Places

In Ukraine, a state-funded place exempts the student from paying tuition as the government allocates a lump sum of funding directly to the university to support the student's study. Such places are distributed through a competitive, merit-based admission process. Applicants are ranked based on their NMT scores nationwide. Each applicant may apply to up to five programs across different universities, indicating their preferences in order of priority. All placements are managed through a centralized electronic system. The system automatically assigns the applicant to the highest-priority program for which their score is sufficient.

The number of state-funded students a university admits is directly linked to its ability to attract high-scoring applicants who list it as their top choice. The higher the number of such applicants, the more state-funded places the institution receives through the competitive process. However, this is constrained by a maximum cap set by the Ministry of Education and Science for each program. This cap is adjusted annually for established programs based on the previous year's enrollment of high-achieving students. For new programs with no prior state-funded places, the cap is based on the number of tuition-paying students admitted in the previous year who had scores no lower than the minimum score eligible for a state-funded place in that field of study nationally.

Until 2021, only public universities could participate in the state-funded system. Private institutions, including the Kyiv School of Economics (KSE), were excluded and could only enroll tuition-paying students. For KSE, gaining access to state-funded places was strategically significant. Such places have long been associated with higher educational quality and institutional credibility in Ukraine, making them a powerful tool for attracting top applicants and building trust among prospective students and their families.

KSE undergraduate programs were granted a maximum cap of 23 state-funded places for the first time in 2022. This and the following years, the cap was filled to its maximum each time. This number grew to 73 places by the 2024 admission cycle, reflecting the KSE's growing ability to attract high-performing applicants and its successful integration into the national competitive admissions system.

Student Retention

One of the challenges in undergraduate programs is the significant attrition rate. 20-35% of students voluntarily withdraw or are expelled after the first year of study. Undergraduate programs monitor the reasons for student withdrawals. Short interviews are conducted with students to determine the causes of their departure, which vary among different cohorts.

KSE Undergraduate Programs Student Retention (different colors represent different cohort years)

	Admitted	Oct 2021	Oct 2022	Oct 2023	Oct 2024
BE25	53	51	38	28	22
SE25	18	18	13	10	5
EBD25	22	22	12	9	5
BE26	59		58	38	27
SE26	24		23	22	18
EBD26	18		18	11	10
BE27	141			136	85
SE27	72			70	49
EBD27	41			40	28
PS27	38			36	19
AI27	23			22	17
LAW27	19			16	14
AM27	10			10	5
CS27	7			7	4
BE28	108				104

SE28	52				49
EBD28	39				37
PS28	41				40
AI28	29				27
LAW28	22				20
AM28	20				19
CS28	11				11

For students admitted in Fall 2021 and 2022, the primary reason~~s~~ for withdrawal were security-related factors that led the students to leave the country. After the outbreak of the full-scale war, most students from the 2021 cohort went abroad. Students from the 2022 cohort left after intensified air strikes in May-August 2023 and when the border was closed for men 18-60. Typically, students took academic leave, pausing their studies, and then, most often after a year, formally withdrew.

In the 2023 cohort, the reasons for withdrawal changed. The most common reason was low academic performance, which strongly correlated with low admission scores. The average admission score among students who withdrew was 159. The second most common reason was going abroad and an unwillingness or inability to attend school in person.

Reasons for Withdrawal or Expulsion, Undergraduate Students, 2023 Admission Cohort

Reason	Number of students	%	Admission score
Low academic performance	44	35	159.6
Replaced abroad / No distance learning	23	18	175
Personal circumstances	13	10	164.9
Did not start studies, chose another university	10	8	171.3
Lack of information	9	7	171.0
Wants to change a major	6	5	185.9
Other	5	4	167.2
Unable to combine with work	5	4	166.5
Non-payment	3	2	171.2
Violation of academic integrity	3	2	153.7
Unable to combine with another study	2	2	173.9
Dissatisfaction with the quality	2	2	181.5

Lack of accreditation	1	1	151.0
Grand Total	**126**	**100%**	**167.2**

Low admission scores are a symptom of a broader issue. Earlier, we outlined the primary challenges faced by undergraduate programs, including underdeveloped learning skills, gaps in subject knowledge, and academic dishonesty, as well as the strategies we deploy to mitigate these issues, from active student engagement to small group learning and comprehensive feedback. Students (especially those with low scores) who are unwilling to make significant academic efforts will not respond to these interventions.

Unfortunately, due to a severe decline in the quality of secondary education, the government has significantly simplified the external entrance tests over the past five years. For example, mathematics no longer includes open-ended problem-solving tasks, and Ukrainian and English language exams do not require essay writing. All tests consist solely of multiple-choice questions. Increasingly, there are cases where individuals with average test scores lack the necessary knowledge and skills for higher education.

The 2023 year's score of 140 on the entrance test might be equivalent to 150-160 in 2024. As the quality of secondary education declines and the entrance exams are simplified, the minimum admission score requirement for applicants should go up. It is also crucial to continue actively searching for talented applicants and those willing to put in the effort to study.

We recommend establishing full-fledged preparatory courses lasting up to a year. These courses would serve two purposes: they would prepare students for undergraduate programs at KSE and train them to pass external standardized tests. Preliminary data suggests that some of these steps, taken in the 2024 admission process, have contributed to improving student retention. For example, the failure rates in first-term mathematical courses have decreased. The failure rate in "Introduction to Mathematics" decreased from 18.8% in 2023 to 12.9% in 2024. Similarly, in "Probability Essentials", the failure rate declined from 17.7% to 12.5% over the same period. By continuously refining these strategies, KSE will improve student retention and academic success rates.

Faculty Recruitment

Given the specific needs of undergraduates, faculty members must possess and be willing to share their expertise, explain complex material effectively, and engage and motivate students in the learning process. They should be receptive to constructive feedback from students and academic directors, be prepared to handle a significant workload, including emotional demands, and be meticulous.

These are high standards, and the number of individuals who fully meet them is relatively small. In contrast to the common practice at many Ukrainian universities (where hiring processes are often limited to formal announcements and rely heavily on internal networks) KSE undergraduate programs conduct an open and transparent search for candidates. This includes actively promoting job vacancies through social media and YouTube podcasts to reach a broader audience beyond the institution. This approach challenges the post-Soviet tradition of non-transparent hiring practices, which have persisted in part due to non competitive salaries in the higher education sector.

Open recruitment processes have generated a significant number of applications. During one of the largest hiring campaigns in the summer of 2023, open searches produced 49 applications for faculty positions and 47 for teaching assistant roles. Ultimately, 14 candidates were appointed to faculty positions, while five were selected as teaching assistants.

Faculty Selection Process

The selection process for faculty in undergraduate programs consists of four stages. A candidate submits a resume and cover letter and is then interviewed by the academic director of the program. Candidates then conduct a trial lecture, which is evaluated by students. Finally, the selection committee, composed of all academic directors and several experienced faculty members, reviews the materials and votes. For permanent positions, the University Senate may also vote on the candidacy.

In the cover letter, candidates are asked to provide a brief vision for their course and include previous student feedback results (if available). The interview with the academic director, aside from general acquaintance and assessing communication skills, helps determine the candidate's motivation and evaluate their knowledge of the subject matter.

If the interview is successful, the candidate proceeds to the trial lecture stage. Candidates choose their topics. The students attending trial lectures, "testers", are specially selected and engage in this process as part of their work-study obligations (as they hold academic grant to cover their studies). To become a tester, students must pass a selection process that evaluates attentiveness, responsibility, reflectiveness, and an understanding of the key professional traits of a KSE faculty. Following the trial

lecture, evaluators provide detailed written feedback by answering 17 open-ended questions covering material delivery, structure, timing, and audience engagement.

After the trial lecture, the faculty selection committee reviews all materials: CVs, video recordings of trial lectures, and testers feedback. Before meeting, each committee member assigns scores based on key criteria, including subject knowledge and preparation, the ability to deliver information in a structured and effective manner, presentation and public speaking skills, proficiency in using modern teaching tools, and knowledge of course design. During the committee meeting, members discuss and decide on hiring or rejection.

Between December 2023 and December 2024, the committee reviewed over 110 candidates for faculty positions. Lately, the selection process has yielded multiple qualified candidates per vacancy, forming a reserve of candidates that academic directors can approach for future openings.

This intensive and demanding selection process sets KSE apart from many other universities, where faculty hiring often relies heavily on formal credentials, academic titles, and informal networks. In contrast, KSE's approach prioritizes demonstrated teaching ability, student-centered communication skills, and motivation to meet the demands of a rigorous academic environment. Formal credentials are considered, but they carry weight only when substantiated through performance in the trial lecture and interviews. Moreover, the process is deliberately designed to eliminate the influence of informal connections, which can compromise both the fairness of hiring and the ability to hold faculty accountable for performance. By ensuring an open, competitive, and merit-based selection process, KSE promotes a faculty culture rooted in professionalism, transparency, and teaching excellence.

Expanding Recruitment Tools

To attract a greater pool of faculty applicants, in 2024 we launched a podcast, PodCampus, about university teaching, which features six faculty members from different undergraduate programs. The idea was to create a niche media product targeting individuals who already teach or are interested in teaching, and who share the university's core values and principles. 11 candidates applied because of watching the podcast; five successfully passed the selection process and were invited to teach. PodCampus has gained traction, with each episode receiving 7,000-10,000 views, positively contributing to KSE's positioning.

As outlined in the section Key Features of KSE Undergraduate Programs, courses are typically delivered by teaching teams comprising two to six educators. The most common structure includes one lead faculty member responsible for lectures and at least one group of practical sessions supported by several teaching assistants (TAs). TAs are frequently recruited based on faculty recommendations. However, we conduct a more active search process for courses with large enrollments (100–200-300 students). We typically draw TAs from specific talent pools. For IT courses, we engage

experienced industry professionals who are confident and motivated to teach. For economics courses, the pool mainly includes graduates and current students of KSE's master's programs. For mathematics, TAs often come from PhD students or alumni of master's programs. These sources have proven to be reliable and effective.

Since the third year of our undergraduate programs, we have also begun recruiting our own bachelor's students as TAs. Although this is an unconventional approach, we have found that top-performing undergraduates often possess a firm grasp of the material and the ability to explain it clearly to others. Given the significant variation in students' academic levels, the gap between senior bachelor's students and those they support is often comparable to that between graduate and undergraduate students. Examples of this model include senior IT students teaching introductory courses to first-year economics students or second-to-fourth-year economics students facilitating practical sessions in foundational economics courses for first-year students. Currently, KSE undergraduate students account for approximately one-quarter of all teaching assistants. This internal talent pool is a valuable resource with strong potential to support the further scaling of KSE's undergraduate programs.

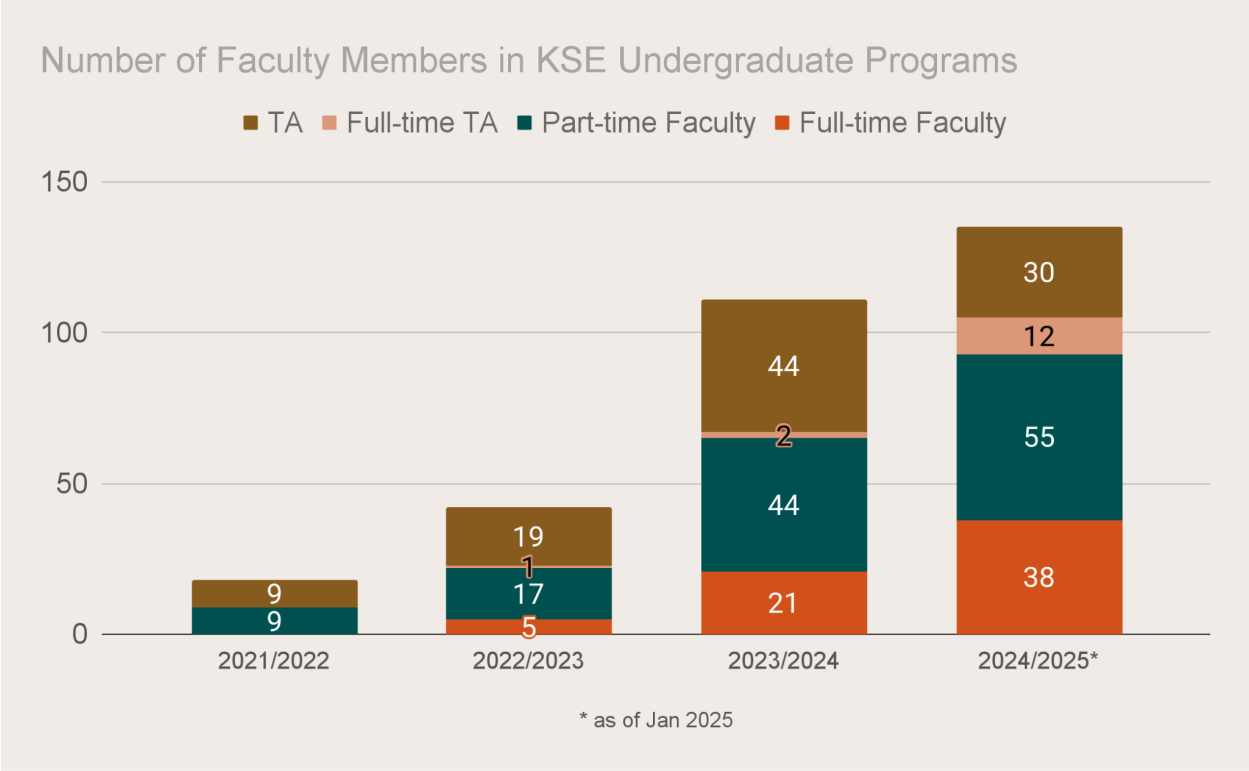
Recruitment Results

From 2021 to 2024, 112 faculty members and 96 teaching assistants were recruited.

In the absence of a dedicated Human Resources (HR) department responsible for faculty affairs, the dean and academic directors have overseen recruitment processes for the past four years. The undergraduate program team developed contract templates, salary grading structures for faculty and teaching assistants, function matrices, and evaluation forms. Beyond recruitment, the undergraduate program team has managed other core HR functions such as onboarding, conflict resolution, performance evaluation, and talent development and retention. While this approach has enabled agility and close oversight during the formative stage of the programs, there is growing need and opportunity to share these responsibilities with a dedicated HR unit to ensure long-term sustainability and professionalization.

Faculty Development

The support provided by academic directors, the diligence and motivation of students, the culture of academic integrity, a modern and comfortable campus, and the overall dynamic development of KSE contribute to increasing faculty engagement. Many faculty members who initially taught one course later agreed to teach three courses and became full-time faculty. In 2021, there were no full-time faculty members in the undergraduate programs, but by the end of 2024, this number had grown to 38. The number of part-time faculty members also rose, reaching over 50 by the end of 2024. Additionally, after four years of continuous development of the teaching assistant system, a team of 12 full-time teaching assistants was established, along with over 30 individuals working as part-time assistants in specific trimesters. In four years of the undergraduate program's existence, only three full-time faculty members have left. From the very beginning, the professional development of faculty members has become an integrated part of their teaching, with the dean and academic directors providing ongoing supervision.



Course Syllabus Development

At the syllabus development stage, the academic director provides initial guidelines on thematic content, the course's place within the overall program, previously covered topics, desired class formats and activities, assessment methods, and student interaction strategies. The academic director collaborates iteratively with the faculty

member to help develop a coherent and well-aligned syllabus. This process is intended not to limit faculty autonomy, but rather to support instructors — especially in the specific context of a rapidly evolving academic environment, where newly introduced programs, diverse student backgrounds, and uneven prior preparation present practical challenges. Collaborative review includes evaluating whether planned activities effectively engage students, ensuring transparency in assessment and assignment expectations, confirming the feasibility of assigned readings and study materials, and reviewing guidelines for the use of AI tools.

The syllabus is regarded as a contract between the faculty and students, providing a clear roadmap for successful course completion. The first lectures are often dedicated to collectively reviewing the syllabus to ensure mutual understanding and effective planning.

Course Monitoring and Midterm Adjustments

During the teaching process, the dean and academic directors monitor course progress by attending classes, communicating with students, and reviewing lecture recordings. An important aspect is midterm anonymous student feedback, which academic directors analyze with faculty members. This approach enables necessary adjustments in the second half of the course, which may include changes to the schedule, activities modifications, new topics, or an increase in class sessions, among other refinements. Flexibility has always been a priority, given that undergraduate programs are new and require a short feedback loop to improve learning outcomes.

During the teaching process, the dean and academic directors remain engaged with academic delivery by maintaining open communication with faculty and students, occasionally attending classes, and reviewing selected lecture recordings. A key element of this supportive approach is the collection of anonymous midterm student feedback, which academic directors review collaboratively with faculty. This approach enables necessary adjustments in the second half of the course, which may include changes to the schedule, activities modifications, new topics, or an increase in class sessions, among other refinements.

Adaptability has always been a priority, given that undergraduate programs are new and require a short feedback loop to improve learning outcomes. This need for instructional agility and timely course adjustments is especially important in the Ukrainian context, where students often enter with varied levels of academic preparation due to recent disruptions in schooling, displacement, and broader societal instability. Faculty have responded positively, seeing this process as a partnership that helps them better understand student progress and adapt their teaching accordingly. Responsiveness and flexibility are core principles of the undergraduate programs, ensuring a short feedback loop that supports continuous improvement in learning outcomes.

Faculty Training Programs

Since launching KSE undergraduate education, the most motivated faculty members have attended training courses at The Yehuda Elkana Center for Teaching, Learning, and Higher Education Research at Central European University[4]. These systematic and practical training programs help faculty discuss challenges with international experts and find practical solutions.

To provide training for more (and especially new) faculty members, we developed a course entitled, “Basics of Teaching at KSE” in summer 2023. This course covers essential topics. including the syllabus as a teaching tool, KSE values and processes, the flipped classroom, team teaching, and principles and tools for assessment and feedback. The course also addresses working with diverse student groups, trauma-sensitive teaching and communication, and learning and teaching through partnerships.

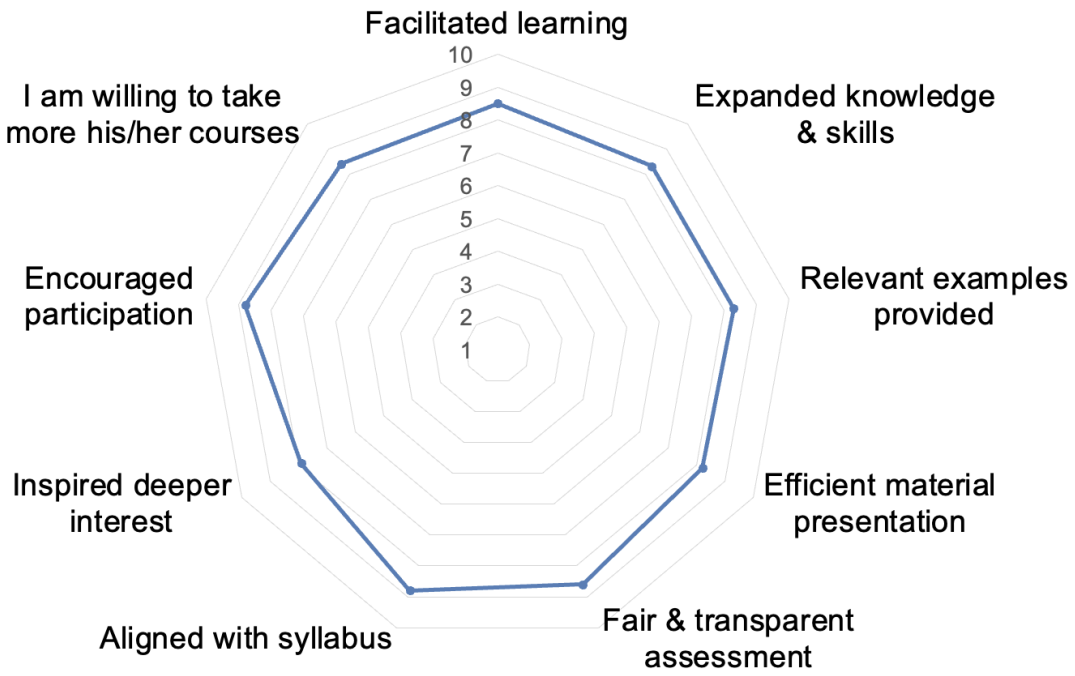
Basics of Teaching at KSE provides an understanding of KSE’s fundamental teaching principles and approaches and offers guidance on addressing key challenges in faculty work. It has disseminated best practices during the scaling-up of the undergraduate program and has become an onboarding tool for new faculty. Over 60 faculty members and teaching assistants have successfully completed the course. To continually improve its effectiveness, the course should be updated with new topics, particularly on AI tools for teaching. It could also be split into separate modules for faculty and teaching assistants.

Student Teaching Evaluations

Student teaching evaluations have been integral to the undergraduate programs since their inception. We have consistently maintained a high level of student participation in surveys, as a low response rate undermines the validity of feedback received. Students participate in an anonymous survey where they provide comments and rate faculty and teaching assistants on nine parameters on a scale of 1 to 10.

[4] Foundations of Teaching in Higher Education; Learning by Design; Democratic and Inclusive Teaching & Learning

Results of Students Teaching Evaluation for KSE BA Programs in the 2023/2024 Academic Year, average scores



In the 2023/2024 academic year, 65 full-time and part-time faculty members who taught 136 different courses in undergraduate programs received an average score of 8+ for each parameter, except for — “inspired deeper interest”, which scored 7.9. The average response rate was 67%.

Faculty Performance Reviews

Student teaching evaluations, faculty observation, and academic director assessments form the basis of an end-of-course interview, where the academic director discusses necessary course modifications with the instructor for future iterations.

Additionally, academic directors in undergraduate programs conduct an annual faculty performance evaluation. Faculty are assessed based on expectations set at the beginning of the academic year, using several parameters:

- **Professional knowledge** — the faculty member demonstrates deep and current expertise in their subject area, aligned with the program’s academic standards.
- **Teaching methods** — diverse and practical instructional approaches tailored to students’ learning needs.
- **Syllabus readiness** — timely preparation and submission of a complete and coherent course syllabus.
- **Class preparation** — development of necessary materials, assignments, and resources in advance of classes.

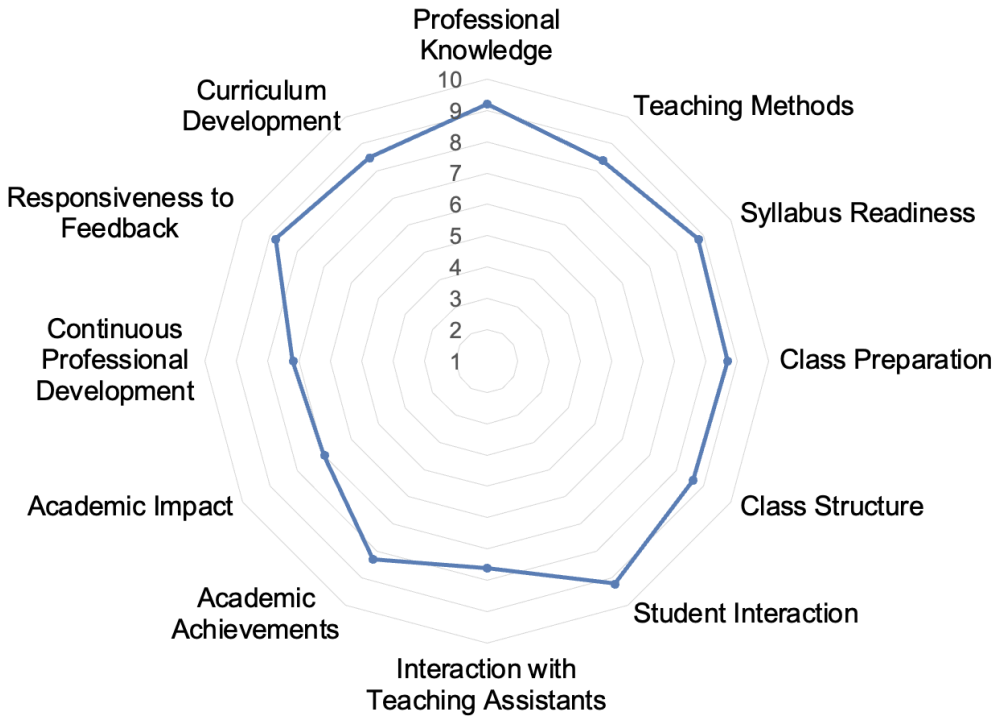
- **Class structure** — well-organized lesson plans that promote a logical and clear understanding of the material.
- **Student interaction** — ability to foster a supportive environment, encourage discussion, respond effectively to questions, and clarify complex topics.
- **Interaction with teaching assistants** — effective coordination and supervision of TA contributions to the course.

Academic achievements are also considered, e.g. publications in scholarly journals, participation in research projects, and conference contributions. The academic impact of faculty research is assessed through citations and engagement with other scholars.

The evaluation process takes into account the specific responsibilities assigned to each faculty member. Not all parameters are applied universally. For example, academic publishing may not be expected during certain periods, or a faculty member may have taught without the support of a teaching assistant. An understanding and context-sensitive approach is applied, particularly for faculty who take on additional departmental responsibilities or work under constrained conditions.

Academic directors briefly summarize the faculty's key achievements, highlighting their strengths and weaknesses. These personalized evaluations were also used in discussions regarding salary increases for instructors. The final annual review of faculty members serves as the basis for negotiations on contract extensions, identifies strengths and areas for growth, and helps better define their role for the upcoming academic year.

Faculty Evaluation Results by Academic Directors for KSE BA Programs in 2023/2024, average scores, N=55



In the 2023/2024 academic year, academic directors evaluated 55 faculty members[5]. Most parameters received average scores of 8 or higher. Slightly weaker areas, with scores around 7+, were observed in research activities, participation in teaching excellence training, and interaction with teaching assistants.

[5] This number is lower than the total number of faculty, as academic directors also teach and do not evaluate themselves.

Quality Management Cycles of Undergraduate Programs

Some information in this chapter overlaps with content presented elsewhere in the report. This intentional repetition ensures that this chapter can be read independently without loss of essential context.

One of the defining features of undergraduate degree programs is the analytical approach to their design. At each stage, the team collects and analyzes insights and data from key stakeholders to continuously improve program content and core processes. During the accreditation of undergraduate programs, experts highlighted the high level of the quality assurance system: "*The experts are very impressed by the internal quality assurance system implemented at KSE. The university takes a professional and comprehensive approach to quality assurance, supported by state-of-the art monitoring tools which allow for in-depth analyses".*[6]

Undergraduate programs follow a typical PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) quality management cycle. Quality management cycles are categorized into two types depending on how quickly changes occur. **Fast cycles** involve interventions directly impacting the learning process within the current course or academic year. **Iterative cycles** refer to changes that influence the learning process in subsequent iterations of a course or multiple courses at the subject level or from the next academic year at the program level.

Fast Cycle

Approximately at the midpoint of each course, an anonymous midterm student survey is conducted to assess the quality of course content and teaching. This survey is centrally administered by the Study support office. Students provide feedback on the organization and content of the course, their learning progress, the number of hours spent on the subject outside of class per week, and the performance of the course faculty member and TAs.

The course instructor/professor and the academic director analyze this feedback. If needed, the dean may also be involved in the analysis. After reviewing the results, the faculty shares the findings with students in two key categories. The first includes changes that will be implemented in the second half of the course to enhance the learning experience. The second addresses student suggestions that were not adopted and explains why they were not implemented.

[6] Full accreditation reports are available here
https://www.zeva.org/site/assets/files/1750/ip-1096-1_kse_accreditation_report_final.pdf
https://www.zeva.org/site/assets/files/1750/ip_1098_kse_accreditation_report_final.pdf

The fast cycle allows for better course adaptation to student needs that were not initially apparent and only emerged during the learning process. It also reinforces the importance of student feedback by demonstrating that it can directly influence the educational process, thereby encouraging active participation in surveys.

In addition to the centralized survey, some faculty members conduct their own ongoing surveys. These may take the form of exit tickets after class, surveys every two to three weeks, or a continuously open feedback form that is periodically reviewed. Such methods allow faculty to address student concerns even more quickly. These surveys are managed directly by the faculty members.

Additionally, the academic director monitors whether a course successfully covers the planned topics and learning outcomes. Suppose some topics are undercovered and are crucial for mastering future courses within the academic year. In that case, the academic director collaborates with the faculty to integrate these topics and prevent learning gaps, ensuring students achieve the intended learning outcomes.

Additionally, the academic director monitors whether a course successfully covered the planned topics and learning outcomes. If a topic is undercovered yet crucial for future courses, the academic director collaborates with the instructor to prevent learning gaps, ensuring students achieve the intended learning outcomes.

Students also take the initiative to propose specific organizational changes within the ongoing year. For example, students have initiated changes such as reducing gaps between classes when scheduling, a more informed selection of electives, and the possibility of undertaking internships throughout the year rather than only in the summer, among others.

Students may also propose organizational changes outside the midterm feedback process. They have initiated adjustments such as reducing the time between classes in the schedule. In addition, they have requested clearer and more timely information about elective courses. Another common suggestion has been to allow the possibility of undertaking internships throughout the academic year, rather than limiting them to the summer period. These kinds of inputs reflect the program's openness to student-driven improvements and illustrate how the short feedback loop enables timely responses not only to teaching quality but also to broader aspects of academic organization and student experience.

Course-Level Iterative Cycle

Each course must produce specific learning outcomes. These outcomes are the foundation of the syllabus, which details course topics, literature, learning activities, assignments, and grading policy, including the grading rubric.

Before drafting the syllabus, the faculty member receives guidance from the academic director on the course's role within the program, its connections to other courses,

suitable learning activities, and students' academic profiles. The syllabus is typically finalized 1-2 weeks before the course begins and reviewed by the academic director.

At the end of the course, students complete an anonymous survey administered by the Study Support Office. Like the mid-term survey, this collects feedback on course organization, content, learning achievements, time investment, and the effectiveness of lecturers and TAs.

The final survey results allow the faculty to evaluate whether midcourse adjustments were effective and to consider changes for the next iteration of the course. The academic director usually holds a retrospective meeting with the faculty to discuss what worked well and what needs improvement. Based on this, faculty members revise the syllabus and refine the course design for the next iteration.

Program-Level Iterative Cycle

Pre-Launch

Before launching the first three undergraduate programs, the KSE International Academic Council conducted a thorough review of their goals, target student profile, graduate profile, curriculum, and potential risks. The successful rollout of these initial programs created a strong foundation and internal expertise that informed the development of subsequent programs. As a result, later undergraduate programs were launched based on established models and internal review mechanisms, with the International Academic Council providing feedback and recommendations after their initial implementation. This shift reflected both confidence in the internal development process and the need to move quickly in response to evolving strategic priorities of KSE.

Before developing a new undergraduate degree program, the dean and/or academic director consult with academic and industry professionals, review curricula from leading European and American universities, and consider recent labor market trends to ensure alignment with employer expectations.

The academic director and the dean define the program's key high-level components. Program goals establish the long-term challenges and societal needs that graduates will be prepared to address. The graduate profile outlines expected learning outcomes, core competencies, and career prospects. The student profile describes incoming students' anticipated academic background, interests, and personal traits. Finally, the curriculum is structured, detailing course names, sequencing, and logical connections.

Once the program design is approved, faculty recruitment begins. Candidates submit their applications, which undergo a CV review, followed by an interview with the academic director. Shortlisted applicants then conduct a trial teaching session, which is evaluated through student feedback. The final decision is made by a selection committee based on both subject-matter expertise and teaching ability. New faculty members are mainly recruited annually as new program cycles begin.

Start of the Program

All newly selected faculty members, in addition to working with the academic director on the syllabus (see course-level iteration cycle), take the Basics of Teaching at KSE course, which covers several topics mentioned in previous sections. This course provides an understanding of the basic principles and approaches by which KSE works and also provides advice on how to deal with the main challenges that arise in the work of a faculty.

Also, faculty undergo technical onboarding before starting teaching, which the Study Support Office and the HR department conduct. It includes familiarization with the campus, technical equipment in the classrooms (cameras, microphones, projectors, etc.), LMS, corporate communication channels (email, Slack), responsible coordinators in the Study support office, IT support, administrative assistants, and psychological service.

Before the start of studies, the Study support office draws up a schedule of classes for the trimester, taking into account the distribution of students into groups, free time slots of faculty, availability of bomb shelters, and limits on student workload (usually no more than three classes per day).

All students are enrolled in their courses via Moodle and added to course group chats in Slack. Each Moodle course page contains the syllabus, class recordings, assignments, and access to required learning materials. While all classes are recorded and made available for review, in-person attendance is mandatory, as all courses include classroom activities that require active participation. In many cases, attendance directly affects students' grades, and some courses enforce a policy allowing no more than three absences per term. Recordings are intended as a supplementary resource and are primarily used by students who attended class to revisit the material when preparing for tests or completing assignments.

Student Feedback

Student feedback consists of several components: course-specific student survey results (midterm and final), program-level student survey results, university-wide student survey results, and separate studies on student opinions (e.g., participants in academic mobility programs).

Course-specific student surveys were described above. The undergraduate programs team conducts sessions at the end of each trimester for program-level analysis. These sessions focus on key takeaways from retrospective meetings with faculty members, student feedback using a dedicated course feedback dashboard, and a review of individual students' academic performance through a performance tracking dashboard. This process provides a comprehensive view of all subjects across the term and strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum. It creates essential input for the possible further development of the program and faculty evaluation.

Students participate in two anonymous surveys at the end of the academic year. The program-level survey gathers feedback on overall impressions, core and elective courses, practical and research components, academic mobility, and career plans. The university-wide survey assesses interactions with administration, campus facilities, scheduling, the learning management system (LMS), student housing, and extracurricular activities.

Students participate in two anonymous surveys in early summer, allowing for program-level adjustments or broader university-level changes to be implemented before the start of the new academic year at the end of the academic year.

- The program-level survey gathers feedback on overall impressions, core and elective courses, practical and research components, academic mobility, and career plans.
- The university-wide survey assesses interactions with administration, campus facilities, scheduling, the learning management system (LMS), student housing, and extracurricular activities.

In the 2024 surveys, more than 40% of undergraduate students participated. The academic directors and dean review the results.

Another critical tool is in-depth interviews with students who participated in academic mobility programs abroad or transferred from other Ukrainian universities. These interviews covered more than 40 students (in 2023-2024) and provide insights into KSE's strengths and weaknesses compared to other institutions. This feedback allows us to identify the best practices of other universities that we can adapt and implement at KSE.

Industry Feedback & Graduate Insights

KSE has placed a strong emphasis on internships as a core component of undergraduate curriculum. This decision responds to research showing that only about 3% of Ukrainian youth aged 13–16 participate in internships[7] — ten times less than the OECD average[8]. To help close this gap and support students' professional development, internships are a mandatory element of KSE undergraduate programs. During the summer, the academic director collects feedback from industry mentors who worked with KSE undergraduate interns. This feedback encompasses students' demonstrated knowledge and skills; their professional growth; the execution of tasks, including timeliness and the need for corrections; as well as mentor recommendations for further development. Students also submit self-reports about their internships. The academic director uses both sources to refine the curriculum during summer break for the upcoming year.

[7] https://www.president.gov.ua/news/fundaciya-oleni-zelenskoyi-predstavila-rezultati-vseukrayins-98021
[8] https://www.oecd.org/en/data/dashboards/teenage-career-readiness.html

Future alumni surveys will help assess which learning outcomes were most beneficial in the workplace and identify skills that should be better integrated into KSE undergraduate education.

Faculty Evaluation

At the end of each academic year, the academic director uses accumulated dashboard information and his own observations to conduct a faculty performance review based on 12 parameters (which are described in detail in another section), which could be grouped into three dimensions: Professional knowledge & teaching skills, Research activity, Professional development. Following this review, the dean and academic director decide whether to promote a faculty member, how to adjust faculty responsibilities in teaching, research, leadership, and outreach, and what upskilling to offer. In some cases, academic directors and deans might decide not to continue faculty engagement.

Program Refinement

At the end of the academic year, the undergraduate programs team makes program adjustments based on collected and analyzed feedback from students, internship mentors, and debriefs with faculty. These changes may apply to incoming cohorts (updating the program's first year) and to current students' later years. In some cases, such changes may occur during the winter break if triggered by unforeseen circumstances (e.g., a faculty member's army mobilization). In some instances, these changes may affect specific key high-level components of the program that were defined in the early stages before the program's launch (pre-launch).

External Accreditation

External accreditation, which is an objective and comprehensive review of a given degree program, is a valuable quality assurance tool. KSE undergoes international accreditation from the German Central Evaluation and Accreditation Agency Hanover (ZEvA) to obtain evaluation and recommendations based on global best practices. German accreditation is one step toward integrating Ukraine into EU educational markets. European accreditation makes KSE more recognizable as a partner, employer, and university choice for prospective students and faculty members. 5,000–7,000 Ukrainian students graduate from German high schools annually; to appeal to these students, KSE must demonstrate that it offers a level of education comparable to universities in Berlin, Munich, Hamburg and Dresden[9].

The international accreditation process strengthens KSE's position and provides insights on how to improve our programs further. As of 2024, three undergraduate

[9] In June 2025 KSE launched a project KSE Way Home - initiative to support reintegration of Ukrainian youth through higher education. A 7-member KSE team conducts outreach and research in Germany, engaging with over 1,000 Ukrainians high school students and education NGOs. The project promotes KSE's on-campus study programs offering grants that cover both tuition and accommodation.

programs have received international accreditation from the ZEvA[10]. Key recommendations include:

- With a view to the prospective further growth of the university, KSE should set itself the mid-term goal of implementing a central, independent quality assurance department and an examinations board. The current quality assurance system at KSE relies heavily on the academic directors, placing a considerable burden on a small number of individuals. To ensure institutional sustainability and effectiveness, the experts recommend redistributing responsibilities more evenly across the university. In particular, establishing a central quality assurance unit and allocating additional staff resources would support academic directors in managing their extensive academic and administrative tasks.
- Although KSE undergraduate programs collect valuable data through student course evaluations and other quality assurance mechanisms, the process of informing students about the results of these evaluations is inconsistent. A more standardized approach to sharing evaluation outcomes will increase transparency, enhance student trust in the feedback process, and enable more effective continuous improvements in teaching quality.
- Since the undergraduate programs launch in 2021, student numbers have grown substantially, placing pressure on teaching capacity. To preserve the quality of education, KSE should ensure that the benefits of small learning groups and individualized support remain intact. Maintaining a low student-to-faculty ratio will foster meaningful academic interactions while addressing teaching overload is essential to prevent burnout and expand the range of elective offerings available to students.
- Undergraduate students undergo frequent assessments throughout the program, which ensures continuous engagement but may also contribute to an excessive workload. This could lead to stress, reduced learning effectiveness, and increased dropout rates. The experts recommend closely monitoring the student workload induced by continuous assessment events to ensure a balanced approach that maintains academic rigor while preventing overload.
- While KSE has already made important strides in digitalizing teaching and learning, the experts recommend continuing and expanding these efforts. In particular, digitalization should also extend to student assessment practices. The university is encouraged to ensure that assessment formats are inclusive and flexible — allowing, where needed, alternative formats or extended time for students with special needs as part of a more adaptive academic process.
- The experts recommend introducing a compulsory course in academic writing and research skills within the undergraduate programs to build a solid foundation for scholarly work. At the same time, students should be systematically supported in developing their information literacy by learning how to actively search for, assess, and use scientific literature throughout their studies. To enable this, KSE should professionalize access to academic resources and

[10] Full accreditation reports are available here
https://www.zeva.org/site/assets/files/1750/ip-1096-1_kse_accreditation_report_final.pdf
https://www.zeva.org/site/assets/files/1750/ip_1098_kse_accreditation_report_final.pdf

consider increasing investment in library infrastructure and digital learning materials.

- The current inclusion of short-term internships early in the undergraduate programs may offer limited value, as students have not yet developed sufficient theoretical foundations. Industry partners have also expressed a preference for engaging with students at a more advanced stage of study. The experts, therefore, recommend replacing early internships with structured, practitioner-mentored project work at KSE and introducing a longer, external internship in the third year. This approach would ensure more meaningful professional experience and better prepare students for the job market demands.
- The experts encourage KSE to enlarge the number of international partner universities. Expanding partnerships will enhance student mobility, create more exchange opportunities, and strengthen the international recognition of the programs. Collaboration with international institutions can also provide students access to diverse perspectives and learning experiences that align with global industry standards.
- Although the programs are well-structured, their visibility and accessibility through public channels remain limited. The experts recommend significantly improving the university's website by providing clearer, more comprehensive information on program aims, structure, intended learning outcomes, course content, and available electives. Special attention should also be given to explaining how dual degree options function in practice. Strengthening the online presentation of these elements will support informed decision-making by applicants, enhance student recruitment, and raise the international profile of KSE.

In parallel to these recommendations, the expert panel noted several key strengths demonstrating the solid foundation of KSE undergraduate education. The curricula are well-structured, future-oriented, and supported by a robust internal quality assurance system that enables effective feedback loops and continuous improvements. The university's didactic approach aligns with intended learning outcomes and integrates contemporary teaching methods such as flipped classrooms, simulations, and problem-based learning. Students benefit from high-quality instruction in small learning groups, close interaction with faculty, and a learning environment that is both academically rigorous and personally supportive. KSE's strategic focus on internationalization is evident in its use of English as one of the languages of instruction, its semester or year exchange programs, and the availability of dual degree option. Moreover, the experts praised the institution's commitment to inclusion, student wellbeing, and faculty development — including onboarding practices, mentoring, and ongoing support for innovation in teaching. These positive aspects provide a strong foundation for further institutional growth and effective implementation of the proposed recommendations.

Directions for Addressing Strategic Challenges

Continuous developments in Ukraine and globally are reshaping the context in which undergraduate programs operate. Patterns observed over recent years — combined with broader economic, demographic, and geopolitical trends — highlight structural challenges that call for a thoughtful and strategic response. While this list is not exhaustive, the four challenges outlined below represent the most pressing issues currently shaping the future of undergraduate education. A summary of these challenges follows, each informing how we may need to plan and adjust our educational model.

Proactive Development of New Programs

A key strategic priority for KSE is strengthening its ability to rapidly and proactively respond to new educational demands. In today's volatile environment, where societal, economic, and geopolitical changes shape learning needs in real-time, KSE recognizes that agility is foundational to impact.

To address this, we should consider building a portfolio of pre-conceptualized academic offerings that could be launched quickly when relevant needs arise. Such offerings would not be reactive but designed in advance to anticipate new policy initiatives, labor market shifts, donor priorities, or emerging societal trends. This approach would allow KSE to function as a provider of education and as a strategic generator of learning solutions.

Each of these "dormant" programs would ideally be developed around several core elements: a defined learner profile (age, readiness, prior knowledge); a structured academic trajectory adapted to that audience; a clear graduate profile aligned with the program's intended purpose; identification of risks and mitigation strategies; and, most importantly, a specific strategic rationale. Whether targeting public sector capacity gaps, rebuilding human capital in wartime, or preparing future economic leaders, each program should correspond to a real, long-term challenge faced by Ukraine or its international partners.

Restoring the Value of Learning Effort

When we reflect on the future of the undergraduate model, we must consider how to respond to a growing cultural and psychological shift: the declining belief in higher education as a demanding, effort-driven intellectual process. Although higher education in Ukraine remains relatively accessible financially, and there is no such active discussion on low returns on education like in the USA or UK, we observe similar disengagement patterns to those seen internationally — shaped by short-term

expectations, overreliance on digital tools, and limited willingness to invest sustained effort in learning.

Students increasingly arrive expecting that university will be efficient, convenient, or even entertaining. Many underestimate the cognitive demands of serious study. Technologies such as AI reinforce the false notion that answers are more important than understanding, while the long-term value of intellectual development — its impact on thinking, decision-making, and long-range planning — often remains unarticulated.

This mindset presents a real challenge for any rigorous academic institution. At KSE, we have encountered cases where this disengagement contributes to academic dishonesty, diminished motivation, and reluctance to grapple with complexity. Moving forward, KSE should consider how to shape a student culture that values sustained effort and intellectual challenge more deliberately.

To strengthen student engagement and long-term commitment, potential improvements could include changes in admission targeting, greater use of structured peer support, clearer messaging during orientation, and more visible engagement with alumni who can speak to the long-term value of their education. Rebuilding the value of effort is not about demanding more for its own sake but about reaffirming that higher education requires active participation — not just attendance.

Scaling Response to Learning Gaps

Another strategic issue shaping undergraduate education is the growing heterogeneity in students' academic backgrounds. Unlike earlier periods when most students entered university with relatively similar levels of preparation, recent cohorts show considerable variation — particularly in mathematics, languages, and the ability to learn independently. These differences reflect broader systemic trends, including war-related learning disruptions, disparities in secondary school quality, and limited access to enrichment opportunities.

KSE experience confirms that, in some cases, students begin their studies with a gap equivalent to six months or more of academic preparation. In this context, standardized instructional models have become increasingly insufficient.

KSE has already introduced several targeted approaches to address diverse student readiness levels described in this report. Recently, KSE has also begun experimenting with AI-supported tools to offer guidance without replacing student responsibility or undermining academic integrity.

The challenge now is to strengthen and scale these efforts — ensuring they are supported with adequate resources, tools, and training for faculty and continuously improved based on internal and external feedback. Rather than lowering academic standards, the KSE approach seeks to provide differentiated support that allows all students, regardless of starting point, to engage meaningfully with demanding coursework.

Responding to Talent Outflow

The large-scale displacement of Ukrainian students, educators, and researchers as a result of the full-scale war has created long-term uncertainties for higher education institutions. The shrinking pool of students physically present in Ukraine and a decline in available teaching and administrative staff pose serious capacity risks — particularly for institutions like KSE that aim to uphold high academic standards.

KSE may need to consider a broader international orientation in both recruitment and staffing. For example, outreach to Ukrainian high school students abroad — particularly in countries such as Germany and Poland — could be expanded. These students often face language and integration barriers that limit their access to strong STEM preparation and may ultimately struggle to meet the expectations of academically demanding institutions like KSE. Early-stage interventions, such as in-country learning hubs, could help maintain academic connections and expand future recruitment options for undergraduate programs. Graduate programs might be offered online or hybrid for Ukrainians currently studying or working abroad. On the staffing side, KSE may need to diversify its recruitment strategy — engaging with the Ukrainian academic diaspora, initiating short-term project collaborations, and inviting international experts to support teaching and program development. Developing targeted pathways for strengthening academic management capacity may also be necessary since this remains a bottleneck in institutional growth.

Importantly, the KSE can also serve as a reintegration platform for Ukrainians living abroad — offering a pathway for youth to remain connected to Ukraine and return through high-quality education. In doing so, KSE strengthens the country's future human capital in profound uncertainty.