

# INTEGRITY IN EDUCATION AS A PREVENTIVE MEASURE AGAINST CORRUPTION: LEGAL ASPECTS

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**Annotation.** The article provides a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon of integrity in the educational space of Ukraine as a strategic legal and ethical tool for preventing corruption. The concept of zero tolerance for corruption is considered not as a situational administrative requirement, but as a fundamental worldview basis that should be formed by the education system.

Based on an analysis of the regulatory and legal framework, in particular Article 42 of the Law of Ukraine 'On Education' and Order No. 977 of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, the authors examine the process of institutionalising academic integrity. It is argued that integrity has transformed from a declarative moral principle into a mandatory legal category, which is a prerequisite for the accreditation of educational programmes and a criterion for the quality of education. Particular attention is paid to the novelties of the 2024 legislation (Order of the Ministry of Education and Science No. 842), which introduced competence in the ability to act on the principles of intolerance to corruption into the standards of higher education. The Strategy for the Development of Integrity in Education for 2026–2030, developed by the National Agency for Corruption Prevention, is analysed in detail. The article also considers the international context (UNESCO and OECD standards) and the role of education in shaping the legal culture of future professionals. It concludes that the systematic implementation of anti-corruption education, the consolidation of ethical standards in the internal regulations of institutions, and real accountability for violations are necessary conditions for the sustainable development of a democratic society and the prevention of the reproduction of corrupt behaviour patterns.

**Key words:** anti-corruption education, academic integrity, ethical standards, legal culture, education policy, zero tolerance, NACP, higher education standards.

## 1. Introduction.

Corruption is one of the key challenges for the sustainable development of a democratic society. Overcoming it requires not only legal and institutional mechanisms, but also the formation of an appropriate culture of integrity, which must be instilled from an early age. Education plays a critical role in this process, as it shapes the worldview, moral values and legal awareness of future citizens.

In the context of the transformational processes taking place in Ukrainian society, the issue of integrity in education is becoming particularly important as a tool for shaping legal awareness and preventing corruption. The educational environment is not only a space for the transfer of knowledge, but also a key mechanism for socialisation, where the foundations of ethical behaviour, legal culture and civic responsibility are laid. That is why academic integrity – as a set of principles of honesty, transparency, responsibility and respect for intellectual property – is seen not only as an internal standard of educational quality, but also as a preventive factor in the fight against corruption.

Corruption in education poses a serious threat to the legitimacy of educational institutions and undermines trust in the education system as a whole. It not only violates the principles of equality and justice, but also fosters tolerance for corrupt behaviour among young people, who may carry these practices into their professional lives in the future. Thus, education that is not based on integrity



loses its socialising function and becomes an instrument for reproducing corrupt models. That is why the introduction of legal mechanisms to ensure integrity – in particular through regulatory acts, internal regulations of educational institutions, monitoring and accountability systems – is a necessary condition for the formation of an anti-corruption culture in society.

**2. The purpose of this article** is to analyse integrity in education as a legal phenomenon that serves to prevent corruption, as well as to examine the regulatory and legal framework, institutional mechanisms and practical challenges associated with the implementation of the principles of academic integrity in the Ukrainian educational space.

### **3. Review and discussion.**

Education is a strategic resource of the state that determines the level of legal culture of citizens, their ability to think critically, comply with the law and resist corruption. It is in the educational environment that the foundations of legal awareness are laid, ideas about acceptable and unacceptable models of behaviour are formed, and an understanding of the principles of the rule of law, justice and responsibility is developed. Thus, education performs not only an educational but also a preventive function in the fight against corruption.

The normative consolidation of integrity as a mandatory component of the educational process not only ensures the quality of education, but also creates conditions for the formation of a generation of citizens who are aware of the destructiveness of corruption and are ready to actively counteract it. Education based on the principles of integrity becomes an effective tool for transforming society towards the rule of law.

According to Article 42 of the Law of Ukraine 'On Education,' academic integrity is defined as a set of ethical principles and legally established rules that participants in the educational process must adhere to during learning, teaching, and conducting scientific research.

In addition to national legislation, local regulations of educational institutions play an important role – provisions on academic integrity, codes of ethics, internal regulations and procedures for responding to violations. These documents specify general legal norms, adapting them to the specifics of the educational institution, and must not only be formally approved, but also effectively implemented through educational practice, outreach activities, and support from the administration and academic community. Thus, the legal concept of integrity in education is a key tool for ensuring the quality of the educational process, protecting the rights of participants in the educational environment, and forming a legal culture that contributes to the prevention of corruption. Its normative consolidation and practical implementation are a necessary condition for the development of education based on the principles of legality, ethics, and responsibility. Integrity in education is a multifaceted phenomenon that combines ethical principles, social norms and legal regulators that determine the behaviour of all participants in the educational process. In legal terms, it appears as a system of norms and principles aimed at ensuring honesty, transparency, accountability and respect for intellectual property rights in the educational environment. This approach allows integrity to be viewed not only as a moral category, but also as a legally significant element of the state's education policy.

In the current regulatory and legal field of Ukraine, the concept of integrity is becoming increasingly relevant and institutionally entrenched. It is actively integrated into key areas of public life – public administration, the judiciary, anti-corruption policy, and educational activities. In particular, legislation and subordinate acts define integrity as a mandatory ethical standard for civil servants, teachers, researchers, students, and learners. This process demonstrates the gradual formation of the ethical infrastructure of a democratic society.

However, in practical application, the concept of integrity is often interpreted narrowly – as a tool for preventing corruption, which boils down to formal compliance with anti-corruption norms. Such a functional approach, although justified in the context of state control, significantly reduces the moral and ethical content of integrity, turning it into a technical requirement rather than an intrinsic value. As a result, integrity is perceived as an external obligation subject to regulation and sanctioning, rather than a personal trait formed through upbringing, education and self-reflection.

In scientific discourse, integrity is viewed much more broadly – as an integral moral quality of a person that encompasses honesty, ethical consistency, responsibility, legal culture, respect for the dignity of others, and the ability to act on the basis of internal convictions. It is not only a means of preventing negative phenomena, but also a positive value that contributes to the formation of a culture of trust, transparency and social cohesion. In this context, integrity must be integrated into educational, legal and management practices as a fundamental principle of a democratic society.

In view of the above, it is important to rethink the normative content of integrity, taking into account its humanistic, educational and cultural potential. This approach not only increases the effectiveness of anti-corruption policy, but also contributes to the formation of ethically mature individuals capable of responsible citizenship, professional activity and participation in public life based on honesty, justice and legal awareness.

The concept of 'integrity' has gradually entered the regulatory and legal field of Ukraine, acquiring different meanings depending on the area of application – the judiciary, civil service, anti-corruption policy and education. Its normative consolidation took place in stages:

-2006 – declarative use: Presidential Decree No. 742/2006 'On the Concept of Overcoming Corruption in Ukraine "On the Path to Integrity"' initiated the use of the term 'integrity' in public discourse. However, the document does not provide a clear definition of the concept, and its content is limited to anti-corruption objectives.

-2014–2016 – judicial and anti-corruption reforms: The Law of Ukraine 'On the Judicial System and Status of Judges' (2016) establishes integrity as one of the key criteria for evaluating judges, covering ethical behaviour, transparency of income and lifestyle compliance.

-2017 – educational reform: The Law of Ukraine 'On Education' (Article 42) for the first time normatively defines the concept of academic integrity as a set of ethical principles and rules that should guide participants in the educational process. This became the basis for the formation of integrity policies in educational institutions.

-2020–2023 – institutionalisation of integrity: Integrity became a mandatory criterion in competitions for civil service positions, in the evaluation of educational programmes (through the activities of the National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance), and in the practice of anti-corruption bodies. Local integrity policies, codes of ethics, and mechanisms for responding to violations have appeared in universities.

Based on the above, it is clear that integrity has gradually transformed from a declarative slogan into a normatively defined category that encompasses both legal and ethical dimensions, particularly in the educational environment.

Order No. 977 of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine dated 11 July 2019, approving the Regulations on the Accreditation of Educational Programmes, became a key regulator that integrated academic integrity directly into the mechanism for assessing the quality of higher education. This document clearly states that adherence to the principles of integrity is not just an ethical norm, but a mandatory part of the criteria used by the National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance (NAQAA) to conduct accreditation reviews. In fact, integrity has become a necessary prerequisite for confirming the quality of an educational programme, as reflected, in particular, in Criteria 5 and 10 of the Regulations. The Regulations place direct responsibility on higher education institutions (HEIs) for creating an internal culture of integrity. According to Criterion 5, each HEI is required to develop clear and transparent policies, standards and procedures for maintaining academic integrity. This includes not only promoting ethical standards, but also implementing technological solutions to combat plagiarism and other violations. In addition, HEIs must establish objective assessment rules, including mechanisms to prevent conflicts of interest and procedures for appealing results. For the educational and scientific level (Criterion 10), the requirements are even stricter: HEIs must ensure that research supervisors and postgraduate students adhere to integrity standards, actively preventing violations in research activities.

The integrity requirements apply not only to HEIs, but also to experts conducting accreditation reviews. Experts are required to act in good faith, impartially and with integrity, which includes a prohibition on demanding or receiving undue benefits (gifts) and the need to maintain an atmosphere of mutual respect during visits. The regulation also establishes severe consequences



for dishonest actions. Accreditation may be denied if the submitted documents contain false information or if the review reveals unlawful or unethical actions by the higher education institution itself that make the process impossible. This emphasises that integrity is an essential condition for successful accreditation. Order No. 977 laid a solid foundation for ensuring the quality of educational programmes by integrating academic integrity into the key accreditation criteria. However, the higher education system continues to evolve and adapt to new challenges, requiring constant improvement of standards. A logical continuation of this process was the adoption of Order No. 842 of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine dated 13 June 2024 'On Amendments to Certain Standards of Higher Education,' which reflects the current needs of the labour market and society, making significant adjustments to the very architecture of training for applicants.

In accordance with Order No. 842 of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine dated 13 June 2024 No. 842 'On Amendments to Certain Standards of Higher Education,' the ministry made changes to the standards of higher education, in particular, adding a clause to educational programmes regarding an additional position of general competence, which includes the ability to make decisions and act in accordance with the principle of intolerance of corruption and any other manifestations of dishonesty, which in turn should be reflected in the expected outcomes, such as knowing the basics of preventing corruption, social and academic integrity at the level necessary to develop intolerance to corruption and manifestations of dishonest behaviour among students.

After the entry into force of Order No. 842 of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine dated 13 June 2024, a new general competence was integrated into higher education standards, which provides for the ability to act responsibly, adhering to the principle of zero tolerance for corruption and dishonesty. In response to these changes, higher education institutions have introduced a course aimed at fostering academic integrity, ethical awareness and anti-corruption behaviour among students. The introduction of this course has a significant impact on the educational environment. Students gain knowledge about the legal basis for preventing corruption, the principles of academic ethics, and critical thinking skills that enable them to make morally sound decisions. This helps to reduce cases of plagiarism, falsification of results and other breaches of integrity, while improving the quality of the educational process.

In the medium term, it is expected that a generation of specialists will emerge who not only possess professional knowledge but are also capable of resisting corrupt practices in their work. Higher education institutions, in turn, are strengthening their internal integrity policies, which has a positive impact on their reputation and trust among society and international partners.

Thus, the introduction of academic integrity as a discipline is a strategic step in the transformation of Ukraine's higher education system. Not only does it respond to contemporary challenges, but it also contributes to the formation of ethically responsible citizens who are capable of acting transparently, honestly and with respect for social values.

In the global international dimension, integrity in education is recognised as one of the key mechanisms for preventing corruption and ensuring the sustainable development of democratic societies. Education systems based on the principles of transparency, ethical behaviour and academic responsibility shape generations of citizens who not only possess knowledge but are also capable of resisting corrupt practices in their professional and social lives.

**International initiatives and documents** The United Nations, UNESCO, the OECD and the European Union actively promote the idea of integrity as an instrument of anti-corruption policy. In particular, UNESCO, in its recommendations on ethics in education, emphasises the need to foster a culture of academic integrity from an early age. The OECD, in its reports on integrity in public administration, highlights the role of education in fostering zero tolerance for corruption. In most countries around the world, integrity in education is seen as a preventive tool in the fight against corruption; a criterion for the quality of education; a factor in the formation of civic responsibility; and a norm of behaviour that is enshrined not only ethically but also normatively. International experience confirms that integrity in education is an effective means of preventing corruption. Its implementation at the regulatory, institutional and cultural levels contributes to the formation of a society where ethical behaviour is the norm and corruption is unacceptable.

Zero tolerance for corruption is not just a political slogan or administrative strategy, but a deeply rooted social attitude that is formed through a system of values, legal culture and educational

practice. One of the most effective mechanisms for shaping such an attitude is the cultivation of integrity, which encompasses the development of ethical awareness, legal responsibility and critical thinking in students.

The educational process has the potential not only to impart knowledge, but also to shape moral guidelines that determine an individual's attitude towards corrupt practices. Fostering integrity – through the integration of ethical standards into curricula, the creation of an ethical educational environment, and the example set by teachers – contributes to the formation of a strong rejection among young people of any form of abuse of power, undue advantage or manipulation.

Building zero tolerance for corruption through integrity education is a long-term process that requires systematic support from the state, educational institutions, and civil society. This approach not only reduces corruption in education but also lays the foundation for the development of a rule of law state where ethical behaviour is the norm rather than the exception. The NACP Integrity Office has developed teaching materials for integrating anti-corruption topics into the educational process. The Ministry of Education and Science has approved these materials for use in the educational process.

In November 2025, the NACP presented the Strategy for the Development of Integrity in Education for 2026-2030, which provides for the systematic implementation of anti-corruption education at all levels, from school to higher education. The strategy was developed in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, the EU Anti-Corruption Initiative, representatives of the academic community, civil society organisations, teachers and students. The Strategy for the Development of Integrity in Education for 2026–2030 is a key policy document developed by the National Agency for Corruption Prevention (NAZK) aimed at systematically improving the educational environment. The main goal of the Strategy is to introduce transparent management practices and promote a culture of integrity in all areas of education. Integrity here is seen not just as formal compliance with rules, but as a deep inner conviction to act ethically and responsibly, even in the absence of control. This is a key condition for the formation of a society based on the principles of transparency and accountability.

The document covers all levels of education – from general secondary (GSE) to vocational (VET) and higher (HE), providing a clear roadmap that brings together the efforts of authorities, teachers, parents and the student community to promote ethical behaviour and prevent corruption.

The implementation of the Strategy is based on the Theory of Change, which posits that the formation of a culture of integrity requires a comprehensive approach and influence on three interrelated areas. This approach is formulated in three strategic objectives common to all levels of education: 1) providing participants in the educational process with a methodological basis and teaching materials on integrity; 2) building the capacity of teaching staff to foster virtues of integrity and integrate them into the educational process; and 3) ensuring that educational institutions operate on the principles of integrity, transparency and accountability on the part of education administrators (in particular, through the implementation of internal anti-corruption compliance). To achieve these goals, the NACP and its partners plan to create specialised training materials (e.g., for primary schools and parents), develop interactive case studies, conduct systematic training for administrators, and expand the network of professional communities (such as the Transparent School project).

Thus, integrity in education is not only an internal quality standard, but also an effective mechanism of anti-corruption policy that must be supported at all levels: from state legislation to the daily practice of educational institutions. This process should begin at an early age and be implemented through the systematic integration of ethical standards, anti-corruption education, academic integrity practices, and legal knowledge into the content of educational programmes. This approach is in line with modern concepts of preventive anti-corruption policy, according to which education plays a key role in shaping civic awareness, legal culture and sustainable moral values.

#### 4. Conclusions.

Ensuring integrity in Ukrainian education requires a comprehensive and systematic approach that combines regulatory consolidation and practical implementation of ethical, anti-corruption and legal components. The regulatory framework is already multi-level, covering legislative acts and internal regulations that should contain not only declarative principles but also specific mechanisms

for preventing corruption and monitoring quality. Ethical education and anti-corruption education must go beyond the formal acquisition of concepts, using interactive methods, case studies and modelling of moral choice situations to develop students' risk recognition, critical thinking and active citizenship skills. To achieve sustainable results, academic integrity and the principles of the rule of law must be institutionally enshrined in educational standards, professional codes and assessment mechanisms, ensuring that all these components do not remain at the level of declarations but become the fundamental basis for shaping a generation with zero tolerance for corruption.

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