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Shutov D. K.

<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-8981-1500>

National Technical University «Kharkiv Polytechnic Institute»

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION MECHANISMS FOR ENSURING HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY: RESULTS OF APPLICATION AND PROSPECTS FOR DEVELOPMENT

The article examines the mechanisms of public administration for ensuring the quality of higher education in Ukraine through the prism of the classifications established in the scholarly discourse, as well as through the practices of their functioning and their actual impact on the international competitiveness of domestic higher education institutions. The methodological basis of the research combines the analysis of regulatory and legal acts, programme documents of the international and national levels, statistical data of the National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance, and a comparative analysis of the dynamics of the positioning of Ukrainian universities in the leading international rankings during 2022–2026. A contradiction has been identified between the architectonics of building the higher education quality assurance system and the comparatively low positioning of Ukrainian universities in international rankings (Quacquarelli Symonds World University Rankings; Times Higher Education World University Rankings; Academic Ranking of World Universities, ShanghaiRanking). In particular, it has been established that the number of Ukrainian universities represented in the QS World University Rankings decreased from 11 in 2023 to 4 in 2026, while the highest position of domestic institutions in the Times Higher Education ranking has consistently remained within the 801–1000 group despite the quantitative growth of their representation. The exhaustion of the potential of the traditional regulatory-legal, organisational-administrative and economic mechanisms of public administration in the higher education sphere has been substantiated, along with the need to search for new mechanisms of public administration for ensuring quality. The article also offers proposals on the necessity of applying innovative mechanisms for ensuring the quality of higher education, namely those grounded in the toolkit of artificial intelligence, big data analytics, and robotic process automation, the practical significance of which is confirmed by international experience and the analytical priorities of the national quality assurance system.

Keywords: public administration; ensuring higher education quality; mechanisms of public administration; innovative mechanisms for quality assurance; accreditation of educational programmes; international university rankings.

Statement of the problem. Ensuring the quality of higher education as an object of public administration is gaining particular significance in the context of Ukraine's European integration aspirations and the need to restore human capital amid prolonged armed aggression. Modern trends in the actualisation of education-related issues, as well as vectors for their further development, are defined by the UN Agenda 2030, in particular by Sustainable Development Goal 4 "Quality Education". Sub-clause 4.3 of the said Goal contains the obligation "to ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality higher education, including university, by 2030", while sub-clause 4.4 – "to enhance the quality

of higher education and ensure its close connection with science" [1; 2, p. 80–112]. The targets approved by the UN Agenda place an obligation on national governments to further develop the regulatory and legal framework for assessing the effectiveness of national mechanisms of public administration in the sphere of higher education quality assurance.

The relevance of the matter is confirmed by the Tirana Communiqué of the Bologna Process adopted in 2024, in which the ministers reaffirmed that academic integrity "plays a fundamental role in quality assurance" of higher education and is key to mutual trust and mobility within the European Higher Education Area [13, p. 2–3]. The Head of



the National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance (hereinafter – NAQA) A.P. Butenko has emphasised the importance of complying with the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area and the need for further development of the national system of higher education quality assurance. Among practitioners who have addressed these issues, attention should be paid to the contributions of officials of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine: S.V. Babak, V.A. Voronov, Yu.M. Hryshyna, O.V. Lisovyi, O.I. Sharov and others. Indirect evidence of the significance of higher education quality assurance for state development is the inclusion of NAQA in the list of critically important organisations for sustaining the population's life-support in special periods.

The relevance is also confirmed at the national level. The National Action Plan for Higher Education Quality Assurance in Ukraine for 2024–2026, developed within the SEQA-ESG 2 project (Erasmus+), defines eight priority measures, including those addressing higher education quality assurance through compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015), and full membership of NAQA in the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) [3]. Implementation of these measures is complex and resource-intensive: as of 1 January 2024 the higher education system of Ukraine numbered 633 higher education institutions (hereinafter – HEIs), and the register of NAQA accreditation cases exceeded 9386 items [3]. Additional pressure stems from the consequences of the Russian Federation's full-scale invasion of Ukraine: the disruption of links between HEIs and the labour market, the destruction of HEI infrastructure, and almost uncontrolled population migration. All these factors, combined with the gradual loss of value of higher education for today's youth, necessitate the search for a new paradigm of functioning of the higher education system as a whole and of its individual mechanisms specifically.

Analysis of recent research and publications.

A range of fundamental works has been devoted to the study of public administration mechanisms in the sphere of higher education. The problem of public administration for ensuring higher education quality has been developed in the works of: M.A. Azhazha (theory, methodology and practice of state administration of higher education modernisation in Ukraine); M.V. Biriukova (methodological foundations

of sociological monitoring of education quality; system of indicators for tracking the effectiveness of administrative mechanisms) [2, p. 195–253]; S.A. Vavreniuk (model of an integrated mechanism of public administration for higher education reform; organisational-administrative, financial-motivational and strategic components); S.M. Dombrovska (mechanisms of public administration of higher education in the context of European integration reforms; adaptation of legislation to the requirements of the Bologna Process); I.V. Yermenko (mechanisms of convergence of national quality assurance systems within the Bologna Process) [19, p. 266–295]; D.V. Karamyshev (innovative approaches to the modernisation of public institutions; mechanisms for implementing state education policy under transitional transformations); V.V. Kruhlov and D.A. Tereshchenko (principal barriers to the implementation of quality standards; prospects for improving administrative mechanisms) [7, p. 58–69]; I.P. Lopushynskyi (mechanisms of university autonomy and self-government; foreign experience in decentralising administrative powers); S.A. Moroz (deepened classification of mechanisms in the higher education sphere: regulatory-legal – legislative regulation, standardisation and accreditation; organisational-administrative – institutional support, quality management at the level of an HEI and external assessment; economic – budget financing, state procurement and financial incentives for HEIs) [4, p. 99–151; 5, p. 171–203]; V.M. Moroz (specifics of higher education quality as an administrative category; functional dependence between the effectiveness of administrative mechanisms and the academic results of HEIs) [6, p. 282–292]; A.L. Pomaza-Ponomarenko (conceptual approaches to assessing the effectiveness of mechanisms of state regulation of education and social services); O.V. Postupna (institutional mechanisms of higher education quality management in the context of European integration; assessment of accreditation procedures) [16, p. 116–123]; V.P. Sadkovyi (management of the civil protection system and training of specialists in HEIs of the respective profile; standards for the quality of training of specialists in public administration); A.A. Sbrueieva (transformation of higher education quality assurance systems in the context of globalisation and the Bologna Process) [19, p. 266–295]; I.A. Semenets-Orlova (administrative aspects of educational changes and reform of the higher education system); S.M. Shevchenko (mechanisms of strategic management of HEIs in the context of

reforms; introduction of internal quality assurance systems); O.M. Tyshchuk (relevance of public administration for ensuring higher education quality through the prism of the norms of international-level programme documents and Ukraine's international commitments) [21, p. 83–88]. Some aspects of the issue have been considered by the author within previously conducted research [22, p. 432–437].

These studies developed the paradigm of education quality established in foreign academic discourse, which gained relevance in the works of J. Brennan, T. Shah, L. Schindler, S. Puls-Elvidge, H. Welzant, Y.-W. Hou, R. Yang, P. Materu, E. Mhlanga, L. Vlăsceanu, L. Grünberg, D. Pârlea, H. Pham and other researchers.

Among foreign studies, attention should be paid to the work of L. Harvey and D. Green “Defining Quality” (1993), in which quality is examined through five conceptual dimensions and which has become a methodological reference point for external assessment systems [20, p. 9–11]. The international dimension of the problem is revealed in the work of A. García-Juanatey, J. Jordana and D. Sancho, who note that the effectiveness of multi-level governance is determined by the consistency of actions between the national, institutional and programme levels of the administrative hierarchy [9, p. 530–551].

Despite the sufficient level of scholarly elaboration of the issues of public administration for ensuring higher education quality, individual matters still remain open for further academic inquiry, in particular those concerning the analysis of the effectiveness of using individual mechanisms and the identification of contradictions between the formal architectonics of the quality assurance system and the ranking results of Ukrainian universities in international rankings.

Task statement. The aim of the article is to study the mechanisms of public administration for ensuring higher education quality in Ukraine: to analyse their classification, to reveal the contradiction between the functional development of the system and the actual results in international rankings, and to substantiate prospects for development through the introduction of innovative administrative mechanisms. To achieve this aim, the following tasks are addressed: 1) to systematise classification approaches to the mechanisms of public administration for ensuring higher education quality; 2) to analyse the regulatory-legal, organisational-administrative and economic components of the existing system of mechanisms; 3) to study the dynamics of the positioning of domestic HEIs in leading international rankings as an indicator of the effectiveness of the mechanisms;

4) to substantiate directions for the development of the system of mechanisms through the introduction of innovative approaches.

Outline of the main material of the study. In the scholarly literature on public administration theory, the mechanism of public administration is presented as a system of means, methods and instruments through which the subjects of public administration exert a purposeful influence on the corresponding object to achieve defined goals [7, p. 58–69; 8]. O.V. Fedorchak distinguishes regulatory-legal, organisational-administrative and economic mechanisms as basic structural elements of administrative influence [8]. According to the research of S.A. Moroz (2022 monograph and 2023 doctoral dissertation), in higher education quality assurance these mechanisms are actualised as: regulatory-legal (legislative regulation, standardisation, accreditation); organisational-administrative (institutional support, quality management at the HEI level, external assessment); economic (budget financing, state procurement, financial incentives for HEIs) [4, p. 99–151; 5, p. 171–203]. A more detailed systematisation of the classification approaches is presented in Table 1.

Generalising the approaches presented in Table 1, we may state that the vast majority of scholars focus on the potentials of regulatory-legal, organisational-administrative and economic mechanisms. Drawing on the results of S.A. Moroz, the list of mechanisms used in higher education quality assurance is significantly wider and includes: socio-political, regulatory-legal, administrative-organisational, information-analytical, statistical-mathematical, socio-psychological, economic, moral-ethical, communication-diplomatic, accounting-evaluative, international, and educational-scientific [5, p. 171–203]. Each of these mechanisms bears its own share of responsibility within higher education quality assurance, and their comprehensive use should ensure a high level of effectiveness of administrative influence. At the same time, the practice of using these mechanisms reveals contradictions between the efforts made by the state and the results obtained. For example, within the regulatory-legal mechanism the state has created a fully functional and multi-level system – the Law of Ukraine “On Education”, the Law of Ukraine “On Higher Education” and the Strategy for the Development of Higher Education for 2022–2032 [10; 11; 12], with accreditation of educational programmes through NAQA as its key instrument (the register, as of April 2024, comprised 9386 accreditation cases [3]); the legislative

Table 1

**Systematisation of classification approaches to the mechanisms of public administration
for ensuring higher education quality**

№	Author of the definition	Interpretation of content (definition)	Quintessence of the definition
1	O.V. Fedorchak (2008)	A system of means, methods and instruments of purposeful administrative influence on an object aimed at achieving defined goals [8]	Basic three-dimensional classification of public administration mechanisms
2	S.A. Moroz (2022, 2023)	A specified system of mechanisms of administrative influence in the sphere of higher education quality assurance, encompassing regulatory-legal, organisational-administrative and economic elements [4, p. 99–151; 5, p. 171–203]	Sectoral specification and expansion of classification in the higher education sphere
3	V.M. Moroz et al. (2024)	Higher education quality as an object of public administration, requiring comprehensive administrative influence through a system of interconnected mechanisms [6, p. 282–292]	Theoretical substantiation of the link between the quality of administrative mechanisms and the performance of HEIs
4	V.V. Kruhlov and D.A. Tereshchenko (2023)	Mechanisms of state administration of higher education quality covering instruments to overcome barriers to the implementation of quality standards and to ensure compliance with international requirements [7, p. 58–69]	Systematisation of barriers to implementation of quality standards and substantiation of directions for improving administrative mechanisms
5	O.V. Postupna (2021)	Institutional mechanisms of higher education quality management in the context of European integration processes, including organisational-legal, information-analytical and assessment-monitoring support [16, p. 116–123]	Classification through the prism of European integration transformations and assessment of accreditation activity
6	S.A. Vavreniuk (2024)	An integrated mechanism of public administration for higher education reform combining organisational-administrative, financial-motivational and strategic components	An integrative model oriented towards the reform of the higher education system of Ukraine

Compiled by the author on the basis of [4, p. 99–151; 5, p. 171–203; 6, p. 282–292; 7, p. 58–69; 8; 16, p. 116–123]

consolidation of academic integrity, autonomy of HEIs and independence of the quality assurance system meets the requirements of the Tirana Communiqué of the Bologna Process [13, p. 2–4] – however, the results obtained from administrative influences are not always satisfactory.

A similar situation arises from the analysis of the effectiveness of the organisational-administrative mechanism, represented by the activities of NAQA as an independent regulator, accreditation procedures and the system of external quality assurance; according to García-Juanatey A., Jordana J., Sancho D., the effectiveness of multi-level governance is determined by the consistency of actions between the national, institutional and programme levels of the administrative hierarchy [9, p. 530–551]. The institutional capacity of NAQA is ensured by a register of 4430 experts (of whom 2542 – scientific-pedagogical workers and 888 – students); however, documented challenges include an insufficient number of independent accreditation agencies and the need to expand the register of student-experts [3]. The economic mechanism covers budget financing of HEIs taking into account the results of

accreditation, and the distribution of the volumes of state procurement; nevertheless, even such a complex architectonics does not fully ensure the formation of sustainable international competitiveness of Ukraine's HEIs.

These mechanisms function in a system that demonstrates a significant contradiction between the formal development of the regulatory architecture and the actual positions of domestic HEIs in the leading international rankings. According to the QS World University Rankings, in 2023 there were 11 Ukrainian HEIs represented (the highest position being 541–550), in 2025 – 6, in 2026 – only 4. The Times Higher Education ranking in 2025 covered 17 Ukrainian HEIs, in 2026 – 22; however, the highest position has consistently remained in the 801–1000 group. Such contradictory dynamics – a reduction in QS and quantitative, but not qualitative, growth in THE – bring forth the academic question: the existing mechanisms either are insufficient to form sustainable competitiveness or are applied without orientation to the final result in the global dimension [14; 23]. A more detailed dynamics is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

**Dynamics of the positioning of Ukrainian higher education institutions
in the leading international rankings (2022–2026)**

Ranking	2022	2023	2025	2026
QS World University Rankings	8 HEIs (top: 511–520)	11 HEIs (top: 541–550)	6 HEIs (top: ~500–600)	4 HEIs (top: ~550)
Times Higher Education (THE)	n/a ¹	n/a	17 HEIs (top: 801–1000)	22 HEIs (top: 801–1000)
Shanghai Ranking (ARWU)	none	none	1 HEI (KNU ² , 901–1000)	1 HEI (KNU, 901–1000)
Trend	Growth	Maximum in QS	Decline in QS; growth in THE	Critical reduction in QS

Note¹: n/a – data are absent or not recorded in open sources;

Note²: KNU – Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv.

Compiled by the author from [14; 15; 23].

The dynamics presented in Table 2 testify to a paradoxical trend. The Strategy for the Development of Higher Education for 2022–2032 declares the enhancement of international competitiveness of HEIs as a strategic priority [12], yet the number of Ukrainian universities in the QS ranking has fallen from 11 (2023) to 4 (2026). For comparison: the QS World University Rankings 2026 represents 1501 universities from 106 countries [14]. Such a decline indicates a systemic gap between intent and result in the public administration of higher education quality. In 2026 Ukraine is represented by 22 HEIs in the THE ranking (an increase from 17 in 2025); however, none has moved from the 801–1000 group to higher positions – quantitative growth without qualitative progress [23]. With regard to the Shanghai Ranking – in 2025 Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv entered the top-1000 for the first time (the 901–1000 group) [15] – a positive signal that nevertheless remains an isolated example.

The identified contradiction brings forth the search for innovative mechanisms of public administration for ensuring higher education quality. Three groups of promising directions stand out. Firstly, mechanisms based on artificial intelligence (AI): automated analysis of educational programmes, predictive modelling of learning quality, personalised assessment systems. Secondly, mechanisms based on big data analytics: real-time monitoring of key quality indicators, analysis of graduates' employment trajectories, comparative benchmarking of HEIs. Thirdly, mechanisms of robotic process automation (RPA): automation of accreditation procedures, standardisation of HEI reporting, reduction of the administrative burden on NAQA. The practical significance of these mechanisms is confirmed by international experience: the World Bank project “Ukraine Improving Higher Education for Results”

(UIHERP) is aimed at digitalising the higher education quality management system in Ukraine and introducing performance-based indicators and monitoring mechanisms [17]; the Annual Report of NAQA for 2024 records the need to expand analytical work and to introduce post-accreditation monitoring systems [18, p. 136, 146].

Conclusions. Firstly, the traditional mechanisms of public administration for ensuring higher education quality in Ukraine – regulatory-legal, organisational-administrative and economic – have been formed and are functioning; however, their application does not ensure the expected result at the level of international recognition: the dynamics of the positioning of Ukrainian HEIs in the leading rankings attests to the persistence of systemic gaps between formal quality criteria and the actual competitive positions of domestic HEIs. Secondly, the contradiction between the functional development of the system of mechanisms and the actual ranking positions is an indicator of the systemic limitations of the current model of public administration of higher education quality; the reduction of positioning in the QS World University Rankings (from 11 in 2023 to 4 in 2026) against the background of consistently low positions in Times Higher Education (the 801–1000 group) testifies that mechanisms oriented predominantly towards compliance with formal requirements do not ensure competitiveness in the global dimension. Thirdly, the identified systemic limitations bring forth a direction for further research – the search for and substantiation of innovative mechanisms of public administration for ensuring higher education quality, in particular those based on the technologies of artificial intelligence, big data analytics and robotic process automation, the potential of which for transforming the higher education quality management system requires further scientific and applied substantiation.

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Шутов Д. К. МЕХАНІЗМИ ПУБЛІЧНОГО УПРАВЛІННЯ ЗАБЕЗПЕЧЕННЯМ ЯКОСТІ ВИЩОЇ ОСВІТИ: РЕЗУЛЬТАТИ ВИКОРИСТАННЯ ТА ПЕРСПЕКТИВИ РОЗВИТКУ

У статті досліджено механізми публічного управління забезпеченням якості вищої освіти в Україні через призму існуючих у науковому дискурсі класифікацій, а також практик їх функціонування та реального впливу на конкурентоспроможність вітчизняних закладів вищої освіти у міжнародному вимірі. Методологічну основу дослідження становлять аналіз нормативно-правових актів і програмних документів міжнародного та національного рівнів, статистичних даних Національного агентства із забезпечення якості вищої освіти, а також порівняльний аналіз динаміки позиціонування українських університетів у провідних міжнародних рейтингах протягом 2022–2026 років. Виявлено суперечність між архітектонікою розбудови системи забезпечення якості вищої освіти та порівняно низьким рівнем позиціонування українських університетів у міжнародних рейтингах (*Quacquarelli Symonds World University Rankings; Times Higher Education World University Rankings; Academic Ranking of World Universities, ShanghaiRanking*). Зокрема, встановлено, що кількість українських університетів, представлених у рейтингу *QS World University Rankings*, скоротилася з 11 у 2023 році до 4 у 2026 році, а найвища позиція вітчизняних закладів у рейтингу *Times Higher Education* стабільно залишається в межах групи 801–1000, попри кількісне зростання представництва. Конкретизовано факт вичерпаності потенціалів традиційних нормативно-правових, організаційно-управлінських та економічних механізмів публічного управління у сфері вищої освіти та обґрунтовано необхідність пошуку нових механізмів публічного управління забезпеченням якості вищої освіти. Крім того, стаття містить пропозиції щодо необхідності використання інноваційних механізмів забезпечення якості вищої освіти, а саме тих, що ґрунтуються на інструментарії штучного інтелекту, аналітики великих даних та роботизованої автоматизації процесів, практичну значущість яких підтверджено міжнародним досвідом і аналітичними пріоритетами національної системи забезпечення якості.

Ключові слова: публічне управління; забезпечення якості вищої освіти; механізми публічного управління; інноваційні механізми забезпечення якості; акредитація освітніх програм; міжнародні рейтинги університетів.

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