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BUILDING THE INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY OF MECHANISMS FOR SYNCHRONIZING UKRAINE'S HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY PUBLIC POLICY WITH EUROPEAN STANDARDS

РОЗБУДОВА ІНСТИТУЦІЙНОЇ СПРОМОЖНОСТІ МЕХАНІЗМІВ СИНХРОНІЗАЦІЇ ПУБЛІЧНОЇ ПОЛІТИКИ ЯКОСТІ ВИЩОЇ ОСВІТИ УКРАЇНИ З ЄВРОПЕЙСЬКИМИ СТАНДАРТАМИ

The article analyses the processes of building institutional capacity of the mechanisms for synchronising Ukraine's public policy on higher education quality assurance with the standards of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The study covers the period of transformation of the Ukrainian higher education system occurring against the backdrop of the complex challenges posed by the legal regime of martial law, global digitalisation, and the intensification of European integration processes. The purpose of the study is to conceptualise the transition to a multilevel public policy in the field of higher education quality, to identify the impact of shocks on the quality assurance system, and to outline the strategic priorities for the institutional integration of the National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance (NAQA) into European structures (ENQA, EQAR). The research methodology is grounded in systemic, institutional, and comparative analysis, which enabled examination of

the evolution of the regulatory and legal framework, the activities of NAQA, and key European institutions. The findings indicate that, despite the challenges caused by full-scale Russian armed aggression, reduced funding, and the mass displacement of educational process participants, Ukraine demonstrates a high level of institutional adaptability. The introduction of innovative digital assessment tools, the implementation of post-accreditation monitoring, and institutional accreditation confirm the maturity of the national system. Further synchronisation of the domestic educational space requires proactive adaptation to the draft revised ESG 2027 standards, the development of internal quality assurance systems, and the expansion of international cooperation through European university alliances and joint educational programmes.

Keywords: *public policy, higher education, quality assurance, National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance, EHEA, ESG 2027, stakeholders, institutional capacity.*

У статті здійснено аналіз процесів розбудови інституційної спроможності механізмів синхронізації публічної політики забезпечення якості вищої освіти України зі стандартами Європейського простору вищої освіти (ЄПВО). Дослідження охоплює період трансформацій української вищої школи, що відбуваються на тлі складних викликів правового режиму воєнного стану, глобальної цифровізації та інтенсифікації євроінтеграційних процесів. Мета дослідження полягає у концептуалізації переходу до багаторівневої публічної політики у сфері якості вищої освіти, виявленні впливу шоків на систему забезпечення якості, а також окресленні стратегічних пріоритетів інституційної інтеграції Національного агентства із забезпечення якості вищої освіти (НАЗЯВО) до європейських структур (ENQA, EQAR). Методологія дослідження ґрунтується на системному, інституційному та порівняльному аналізі, що уможливило вивчення еволюції нормативно-правової бази, діяльності НАЗЯВО та ключових європейських інституцій. Результати дослідження свідчать, що попри виклики, спричинені повномасштабною російською збройною агресією, зменшенням фінансування та масовим переміщенням учасників освітнього процесу,

Україна демонструє високий рівень інституційної адаптивності. Запровадження інноваційних цифрових інструментів оцінювання, впровадження постакредитаційного моніторингу та інституційної акредитації підтверджують зрілість національної системи. Подальша синхронізація вітчизняного освітнього простору вимагає проактивної адаптації до проекту оновлених стандартів ESG 2027, розвитку внутрішніх систем забезпечення якості а також розширення міжнародної співпраці через європейські університетські альянси та спільні освітні програми.

Ключові слова: *публічна політика, вища освіта, забезпечення якості, Національне агентство із забезпечення якості вищої освіти, ЄПВО, ESG 2027, стейкхолдери, інституційна спроможність.*

Problem statement. In an era of technological transformation, the globalization of labor markets, and the development of a knowledge economy, the quality of higher education serves as a fundamental factor in ensuring national security, economic resilience, and the sustainable development of any state. For Ukraine, which is undertaking an unprecedented civilizational transition under the extraordinarily complex conditions of full-scale armed aggression, the issue of preserving, reproducing, and qualitatively developing intellectual capital has acquired pivotal significance. The martial law regime introduced in Ukraine in 2022 caused large-scale destruction of educational infrastructure, with more than two thousand educational institutions sustaining damage, while millions of citizens were forced to relocate, becoming internally displaced persons or refugees. In addition, the higher education system faced a substantial reduction in state funding of the sector owing to the objective necessity of redistributing budgetary resources to the needs of defense and national security [1].

Despite these critical impacts, the state's strategic constitutional course toward acquiring full membership in the European Union requires strict adherence to commitments regarding the synchronization of national policies with European standards. High-quality higher education contributes to creating the country's innovative potential and is a key instrument of postwar

reconstruction. Accordingly, building the institutional capacity of mechanisms for synchronizing Ukraine's public policy on higher education quality with the norms of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) is not merely a technical task of implementing directives, but a complex, multidimensional process of transforming the entire academic culture.

The adoption of an updated regulatory framework — in particular, the enactment of the Law of Ukraine "On Academic Integrity," as well as the plans of the National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance (NAQA) to acquire full membership in the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and inclusion in the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) in 2026 — convincingly attest to the transition of the domestic system from the stage of initial adaptation to the stage of full-fledged integration [2].

At the same time, a large-scale revision of the foundational criteria is under way at the pan-European level — the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). A draft of the new edition of these standards (ESG 2027) was released for public consultation at the end of 2025, establishing new requirements for the flexibility, social responsibility, and technological readiness of educational institutions [3]. This creates a unique window of opportunity for Ukraine: the national system gains the chance to become a co-creator of the new rules of the game, proactively implementing mechanisms relevant to the higher education of the European future.

Analysis of recent research and publications. The theoretical foundations of state and institutional capacity, the issues of the formation and practical implementation of state and public policy in the sphere of higher education, and questions of quality assurance consistently remain in the focus of close attention of many leading scholars.

The introduction of quality management systems has substantially affected university governance and academic practice, generating structural convergence and the transformation of institutional culture, encompassing both external pressure from regulatory agencies and global rankings and organizational adaptation, negotiation, and resistance [4].

The conceptual foundations of the study of the notion of "public policy" in the educational sphere have become the subject of systematic research by I. Hruzynska. The author argues that the policy of higher education quality assurance is by its nature precisely public, since it presupposes the broad involvement of non-governmental institutions of civil society, independent assessment agencies, employers' associations, higher education students, and independent experts, thereby forming a system of consensus-based governance [5]. I. Piatnychuk defines public governance of higher education as activity aimed at approximation to European standards in order to obtain the maximum educational effect [6]. Amid the deepening of European integration, Ukraine's higher education faces a complex of strategic tasks encompassing harmonization with the norms of the EU and the Bologna Process, the formation of an inclusive educational environment, and the development of partnerships among universities, business, and civil society. An integral element of this transformation is also the implementation of glocalization strategies, which enable integration into the global educational space without the loss of institutional and cultural identity [7].

An important contribution comes from the publications of international agencies such as ENQA and EQAR, which describe the evolution of quality assurance standards in 2025–2026. These sources point to the need to engage stakeholders, the transition to ESG 2027, and the responsible use of artificial intelligence in accreditation processes [8]. However, the question of the practical synchronization of global trends with Ukrainian wartime realities — where institutional capacity is constrained by fiscal and security factors — remains insufficiently studied.

Statement of the task. The aim of the article is to investigate the processes of building the institutional capacity of higher education quality assurance mechanisms in Ukraine in the context of their synchronization with contemporary standards of the European Higher Education Area.

Presentation of the main material. The introduction of the legal regime of martial law in Ukraine at the end of February 2022 became a test of institutional capacity for the entire system of higher education quality management. Threats to life, the physical destruction of educational

infrastructure, blackouts, and the mass displacement of participants in the educational process demanded swift and extraordinary managerial decisions to ensure the continuity of education and the preservation of its quality.

Under these complex conditions, public policy demonstrated adaptability and flexibility. The Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine and NAQA promptly adopted a number of regulatory acts that made it possible to transfer evaluation procedures to a remote format. Thus, Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 295 of 16 March 2022 clearly defined the specifics of accreditation under martial law [9]. In addition, for institutions of professional pre-higher and higher education that were forcibly relocated from temporarily occupied territories or operate in the immediate zone of hostilities, the possibility of undergoing conditional accreditation without a full review and without charging a fee for services was provided [10].

Despite the considerable difficulties caused by the ongoing war, the process of synchronizing Ukrainian educational legislation with European norms not only did not halt but in fact intensified significantly. This was facilitated by Ukraine's acquired status as a full-fledged candidate for EU accession, which requires the impeccable fulfillment of the terms of the Association Agreement [11]. A landmark stage in building institutional capacity was the adoption by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine in May 2023 of the Law of Ukraine "On Amendments to Certain Laws of Ukraine Concerning the Assurance of the Quality of Higher Education" [12].

The most large-scale step for the domestic academic system was the adoption by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine in December 2025 and the signing by the President of Ukraine at the end of January 2026 of the Law of Ukraine "On Academic Integrity" [13]. The enactment of this act marks the definitive transition of the Ukrainian system from the fragmentary combating of textual borrowings (plagiarism) to the systematic, institutionalized affirmation of a culture of ethical conduct across all tiers of education.

In 2024, an updated NAQA Development Strategy through 2026 was approved, articulating the principal geopolitical and institutional goal of domestic public policy on quality — the acquisition of full membership in the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and

official inclusion in the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) [14]. In 2025, NAQA submitted an official application to undergo the most important stage — external international evaluation with the aim of acquiring full-fledged status. The process involves a thorough assessment and in-depth audit of the agency's activities by an international panel of ENQA experts. Successful completion of the audit and entry into the EQAR register will have a significant multiplier effect for the entire higher education system of Ukraine, namely:

the results of the accreditation of Ukrainian educational programs will automatically be entered into the global Database of External Quality Assurance Results (DEQAR), which will simplify the procedures for the nostrification and recognition of Ukrainian diplomas by employers and higher education institutions abroad;

Ukrainian universities will become considerably more attractive partners for European institutions within the framework of the current creation of joint educational programs;

the internationalization processes of domestic higher education will reach a qualitatively new level, fostering an increase in two-way academic mobility and the attraction of targeted international grants.

The synchronization of Ukraine's public policy with European standards is substantially complicated by the circumstance that the very object of synchronization (the foundational EHEA standards) is currently in a state of dynamic transformation. At the end of 2025, the steering committee published the first complete draft of the updated document — ESG 2027. It is expected that, after thorough refinement, the final text will be officially approved by the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) in the autumn of 2026 and adopted by the ministers of education of the EHEA countries in 2027 [3].

For Ukraine, the transition to ESG 2027 poses entirely new managerial challenges but, at the same time, unique opportunities. An analysis of the document and of the materials of the public discussions makes it possible to identify the key vectors that will require implementation in domestic public policy (Table 1).

Table 1 Vectors of the transformation of European quality assurance policy within the framework of ESG 2027

Vector of transformation of European policy	New paradigm of the ESG 2027 draft	Strategic implications for Ukraine's higher education system
Format of learning and assessment	Inclusiveness toward blended mobility, flexible individual trajectories, and transnational education.	The need to legalize and create effective mechanisms for recognizing non-formal education at the level of the MES and NAQA. Adaptation of the quality assurance system to flexible content.
European Alliances and Joint Programmes	The need for full convergence of procedures. Quality assurance as the principal driver of creating a "seamless" European educational space.	Ukrainian higher education institutions must actively implement the European Approach to the quality assurance of joint programmes, becoming full-fledged equal members of consortia without duplicating reviews.
Social relevance and sustainable development	An emphasis on the social dimension, institutional resilience, innovation, and the Sustainable Development Goals.	Orienting educational programs toward the tasks of Ukraine's postwar reconstruction. Integrating the Sustainable Development Goals into the criteria of the new institutional accreditation.

Source: compiled by the author based on [3; 15]

Public policy in the sphere of higher education quality management must rest upon the following strategic imperatives:

The further expansion of the genuine autonomy of higher education institutions through the active use of institutional accreditation instruments. Universities with a proven high effectiveness of their internal quality systems should be granted maximum freedom in shaping innovative educational trajectories, independently managing the funds they earn, and concluding direct international partnerships.

The integration of cutting-edge EdTech solutions (artificial intelligence, predictive analytics, virtual reality) as powerful instruments for guaranteeing and measuring quality.

The implementation of and compliance with the provisions of the Law of Ukraine "On Academic Integrity." A nation's institutional capacity is measured by the level of absolute trust placed by Ukrainian and international society in the diplomas it issues.

Conclusions. The synchronization of Ukraine's public policy on higher education quality assurance with European standards is an extraordinarily complex, multidimensional, and protracted process that is unfolding amid geopolitical, economic, and security challenges unprecedented in modern history. The comprehensive analysis carried out makes it possible to draw a number of conceptual and practically significant conclusions.

Ukraine has successfully formed a modern democratic model of public policy. In the new model, quality assurance is based on the principles of independent external evaluation, broad university autonomy, and the mandatory consensus of key stakeholders. The institutional foundation of the transformation became the National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance, which, despite difficult conditions, succeeded in building a transparent, digitalized accreditation system that is today recognized by international partners.

The legislative innovations of 2022–2026 indisputably attest to the deep structural maturity of the national system. All the implemented mechanisms are aimed at the systematic eradication of the institutional deformations of the past, a radical increase in the level of mutual trust, and the social responsibility of Ukrainian higher education institutions.

The anticipated successful completion of the complex external international audit, NAQA's acquisition of full membership status in ENQA, and official inclusion in the authoritative EQAR register will be the result of the complete institutional integration of the domestic quality system into the European space. This will open up new opportunities for the recognition of Ukrainian qualifications worldwide, for large-scale academic mobility, and for

the equal participation of domestic universities in global scientific and educational alliances.

The further development of the state's institutional capacity requires strategic adaptation to new global realities. The preparation by the European academic community of the draft updated ESG 2027 standards dictates the necessity for Ukrainian public policy to work proactively, ahead of the curve. The proper legislative implementation of the European Approach to joint programmes, the integration of mechanisms for recognizing non-formal education, and the development of ethical frameworks for the use of artificial intelligence in the educational and scientific process will become the next obligatory steps on the long path toward creating a resilient, innovative, and globally competitive higher education system for Ukraine.

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