

INTEGRATING INSTITUTIONAL ARCHITECTURE AND DIGITAL MONITORING IN THE GOVERNANCE OF YOUTH WORK IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A SYSTEMS-BASED FRAMEWORK AND MATURITY MODEL FOR UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract: Uzbekistan's higher education system has expanded from roughly nine per cent gross enrolment in 2017 to about forty-two per cent in 2025, and the Uzbekistan-2030 Strategy sets a target of at least fifty per cent. This rapid growth has pushed the management of youth work — the organised support of students' social, civic, professional and psychological development — to the centre of institutional agendas, yet the governance of this domain remains uneven and weakly theorised. **Purpose.** The study develops and argues for an integrated framework that unifies three threads usually treated separately in the literature: the systems-theoretic understanding of youth work, the institutional architecture of universities, and the digital monitoring of student engagement. **Methods.** A qualitative, conceptual-analytical design combined a structured review of national and international sources, comparative analysis of foreign practice, content analysis of regulatory documents, and semi-structured expert interviews with managers, educators and psychologists at three higher education institutions in Tashkent, supported by direct observation of extracurricular activity. **Results.** Three reinforcing directions of development were identified — digital management technologies, socio-psychological approaches, and integrated monitoring — alongside persistent fragmentation, formalistic evaluation and a shortage of specialised personnel. Building on these findings, the paper proposes the Integrated Digital–Institutional Governance (IDIG) framework and an accompanying five-level Youth-Work Governance Maturity Model. **Conclusions.** Effectiveness depends less on adding activities than on connecting them: a shared governance core, a common data layer and adaptive feedback move institutions from fragmented, reactive practice toward data-informed, anticipatory governance. The framework offers a transferable diagnostic and design tool for systems undergoing comparable expansion.

Keywords: *youth work; higher education governance; institutional architecture; digital monitoring; learning analytics; systems theory; student engagement; maturity model; Uzbekistan.*

1. Introduction

The place of young people within higher education has changed in character over the past decade. Universities are no longer asked only to transmit knowledge; they are expected to shape civic dispositions, cultivate so-called soft skills, support psychological well-being and ease the transition into the labour market. In this widened mandate, the organised work that institutions carry out with their students — variously labelled student affairs, youth engagement or, in the post-Soviet tradition, *work with youth* — has become a strategic rather than a peripheral function. The way this work is managed, and not merely whether it is performed, increasingly determines the experience and the outcomes of a generation of students.

Nowhere is this shift more visible than in Uzbekistan. According to sector analysts, gross enrolment in higher education rose from roughly nine per cent in 2017 to around forty-two per cent in 2025, with the student population growing from approximately a quarter of a million to about one and a half million in the same period. The Uzbekistan-2030 Strategy commits the country to reaching at least fifty per cent enrolment and to placing several universities in international rankings, while national youth policy has been recognised internationally as among the most active in implementing the United Nations Youth-2030 agenda. Expansion of this magnitude is an achievement, but it also strains the machinery through which institutions accompany their students, exposing bottlenecks in quality assurance, regulation and staff capacity that the same analysts readily acknowledge.

Against this background, a paradox emerges. Individual instruments for working with students — digital platforms, mentoring schemes, counselling services, civic projects, leadership programmes — are multiplying, yet the literature that addresses their governance treats them in isolation. One body of work theorises youth work through systems thinking; another catalogues institutional models; a third examines the digital monitoring of engagement through learning analytics. These conversations rarely meet. The result is a field rich in components but poor in architecture, in which activity is frequently mistaken for effectiveness and in which the measurement of outcomes lags behind their pursuit.

This article sets out to close that gap. Its central argument is that the effectiveness of youth-work management in higher education is primarily a function of integration — of the degree to which strategic intent, institutional structure and operational technology are connected and informed by shared evidence — rather than of the sheer quantity of programmes offered. To advance this argument the paper pursues three

objectives: first, to synthesise the systems-theoretic, institutional and digital strands of the field into a coherent governance model; second, to ground that model empirically in the conditions of Uzbek higher education; and third, to translate it into a practical diagnostic in the form of a maturity model that institutions can use to locate themselves and chart a path of improvement. The remainder of the paper reviews the relevant scholarship, describes the research design, presents and discusses the findings through a series of tables and figures, introduces the proposed framework, and closes with conclusions and recommendations.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Systems theory as a foundation for youth-work governance

The most durable theoretical anchor for the management of youth work is systems theory. Its core proposition — that the components of a system are interdependent and that the behaviour of the whole cannot be inferred from its parts in isolation — translates directly into a holistic view of student development, in which students, faculty, support staff, curricula, resources and external partners form a single interacting whole. Two features of the systems perspective are especially consequential for governance. The first is the feedback loop: institutions that gather evidence from students and stakeholders, and that route this evidence back into decision-making, are able to maintain balance and to improve continuously, whereas those that do not tend to drift. The second is adaptability: because higher education sits within a turbulent environment of technological, demographic and social change, the systems view treats resilience and the capacity to anticipate as governance virtues rather than optional extras. Read in this way, systems theory is not an abstraction but a design brief for how youth work should be organised.

2.2. Institutional approaches and the architecture of student support

A second strand of scholarship turns from theory to structure, asking how universities should organise themselves to do youth work well. Four recurring approaches can be distinguished. The structural approach foregrounds units, roles and reporting lines; the functional approach foregrounds processes and the clear allocation of responsibility; the organisational approach foregrounds coordination, partnership and the flow of information across boundaries; and the innovative approach foregrounds student agency, co-creation and the institution's capacity to renew its own practice. These are not mutually exclusive. The argument advanced here, and developed in Section 5, is that mature institutions layer them — using structure and function to establish order, organisation to overcome silos, and innovation to keep the system responsive. The international literature reinforces the point that an institution without an explicit model of its own is likely to default to fragmentation.

2.3. Digital transformation and the monitoring of engagement

The third and fastest-moving strand concerns the digital instrumentation of youth work. Learning management systems, mobile applications and integrated student platforms now mediate much of the relationship between institutions and their students, enabling real-time monitoring, adaptive support and the early identification of risk. The field of learning analytics has matured to the point where engagement can be measured rather than merely asserted, and where co-curricular participation can be linked to retention and success. Yet the same literature counsels caution. Analytics can mislead when the wrong variables are tracked; time-on-platform does not equal learning; and the collection of behavioural data raises real questions of privacy, ethics and trust that demand explicit governance. Surveys of student engagement are sobering — a widely cited 2023 study found that only around thirty-eight per cent of students in one large national system felt actively engaged — which suggests that the value of monitoring lies not in the data themselves but in the institutional capacity to act on them.

2.4. The integration gap

Reviewed together, these three literatures reveal a clear lacuna. Systems theory supplies a holistic philosophy but little architectural detail; the institutional literature supplies models of structure but engages only lightly with data; the analytics literature supplies powerful measurement but is largely silent on the institutional and strategic conditions under which measurement improves practice. What is missing is a framework that binds the three together — one that treats digital monitoring as the sensory apparatus of an institutional architecture that is itself organised according to systems principles. Providing such a framework, and testing its plausibility against the realities of a rapidly expanding national system, is the contribution this paper seeks to make.

3. Research Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative, conceptual-analytical design. This choice follows from the nature of the research question: the aim is not to estimate the prevalence of a variable across a population but to understand how a complex governance domain is configured and how its parts might be better connected. Within this design, four complementary methods were combined so that the limitations of each were offset by the others.

Structured literature synthesis. National and international sources — peer-reviewed articles, policy documents and sector analyses — were examined to establish the theoretical foundations of youth-work governance and to map the systems-theoretic, institutional and digital strands described above.

Comparative analysis. Practices in the higher education systems of the United States, Canada, the Scandinavian countries, France, the Russian Federation, China and

the Republic of Korea were compared with current Uzbek practice, with attention to the signature mechanisms of each and, crucially, to the conditions under which they might transfer.

Document content analysis. Education standards, the national concept of youth policy, internal university statutes and the electronic management systems in use were analysed in order to surface the organisational and functional components of the existing governance system and the indicators by which youth work is presently judged.

Expert interviews and observation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted at three higher education institutions in Tashkent with managers, educators and psychologists responsible for working with students; these were complemented by direct observation of extracurricular activity, mentoring and leadership development. The interviews surfaced the strengths and weaknesses of current practice, while observation grounded the analysis in lived institutional reality. Findings are reported in aggregated, anonymised form, and the institutions are referred to throughout as HEI-A, HEI-B and HEI-C.

Triangulating across these methods allows the conceptual framework to be developed inductively from evidence rather than imposed deductively, while keeping the scope — three institutions in a single city — clearly in view as a limitation to be addressed by future, larger-scale work.

4. Results and Discussion

The analysis yields four sets of findings, presented below with the supporting tables and figures. They concern, in turn, the institutional models available to universities, the technological directions along which youth work is developing, the comparative lessons of international practice, and the empirical picture obtained from the three Tashkent institutions. Taken together they motivate the integrated framework introduced in Section 5.

4.1. A typology of institutional approaches

The first result is analytical. Synthesising the institutional literature with the documentary evidence produced the four-part typology summarised in Table 1. Each approach answers a different governance question and carries a characteristic strength and a characteristic weakness; none is sufficient on its own.

Table 1. Typology of institutional approaches to youth-work management.

Approach	Governing question	Principal strength	Principal limitation
Structural	Which units, roles and reporting lines exist?	Clear accountability and a stable chain of responsibility	Rigidity; structure without coordination breeds silos
Functional	Which processes are performed and by whom?	Predictable, repeatable procedures and division of labour	Process can ossify into formality detached from outcomes
Organizational	How do units coordinate and share information?	Overcomes fragmentation; enables partnership and flow	Demands cultural change and sustained leadership attention
Innovative	How does the institution renew its own practice?	Student agency, co-creation and adaptive capacity	Hard to sustain without structural and data support

Interpretation. Table 1 reframes a familiar list as a developmental sequence. Structural and functional approaches secure order but, pursued alone, generate precisely the fragmentation observed in practice; the organisational approach is the hinge on which integration turns; and the innovative approach supplies the forward motion that prevents a well-ordered system from stagnating. The scientific implication is that institutions should not choose among these models but sequence and layer them — a conclusion that directly informs the architecture proposed later.

4.2. Three technological directions of development

The second result concerns how youth-work management is actually evolving. The evidence points consistently to three reinforcing directions — digital management technologies, socio-psychological approaches, and integrated monitoring and evaluation — each at a different stage of maturity in the Uzbek context, as set out in Table 2.

Table 2. Three directions of youth-work management technology and their current maturity in Uzbek higher education.

Direction	Core components and function	Current state	Maturity
Digital management technologies	LMS, mobile apps and web platforms used to involve students in events, contests, clubs and project work, and to channel communication	Widely adopted for notification, but interaction and participation tracking remain underused	Emerging
Socio-psychological approaches	Mentoring, counselling, soft-skills and leadership development; civic and social projects that build agency	Strong where social-project participation is high; uneven across institutions	Developing
Integrated monitoring and evaluation	Indicators, analytics and feedback that connect activity to outcomes and inform decisions	Indicators exist but are largely formal and subjectively applied	Nascent

Interpretation. The asymmetry across the three rows is itself the finding. Digital tools are spreading faster than the monitoring capacity needed to make sense of them, and socio-psychological work — arguably the heart of youth development — sits between the two, advanced in some institutions and thin in others. The scientific conclusion is that the binding constraint on effectiveness is not the availability of technology but the immaturity of the monitoring layer that should turn technological activity into governable knowledge. This diagnosis is the empirical justification for placing analytics at the centre of the proposed framework.

4.3. International practice and the conditions of transfer

The third result is comparative. International systems offer a repertoire of mechanisms, but the analysis insists on a second column that the policy debate often omits: what each mechanism requires in order to work elsewhere. Table 3 pairs signature practices with their adaptation conditions.

Table 3. Selected international practices and the conditions for their adaptation to Uzbek higher education.

System	Signature mechanism	Transferable element and adaptation condition
USA / Canada	Interactive methods (flipped classroom), service-learning, rich campus-life infrastructure	Service-learning and student agency transfer well; require curricular space and recognition of civic work
Scandinavia	Online platforms enabling self-paced, self-directed study	Self-education culture transfers; depends on connectivity and on trust in student autonomy
France	Coordinated youth identity and student-branding mechanisms	Coordination logic transfers; the branding apparatus must be re-rooted in local culture, not copied
Russia (e.g., ITMO)	Youth-brand development, naming and student-identity technologies	Identity-building transfers; needs dedicated capacity and a clear institutional narrative
China / Republic of Korea	STEAM-based, project-driven, creativity-oriented approaches	Project orientation transfers; requires interdisciplinary curricula and assessment reform

Interpretation. Read across its rows, Table 3 makes a single methodological point with several illustrations: the unit of transfer is not the practice but the practice-plus-condition. Importing a French youth-branding scheme or a Korean STEAM model without its enabling conditions — curricular space, connectivity, dedicated capacity, assessment reform — predictably disappoints. The scientific conclusion is that comparative learning in this field should be conditional rather than imitative, a principle that the proposed maturity model operationalises by tying each advance to specific institutional prerequisites.

4.4. Empirical findings from three Tashkent institutions

The fourth result is the empirical core. The interviews and observation at HEI-A, HEI-B and HEI-C produced a consistent, if modest, evidence base, summarised in Table 4 and visualised in Figure 4. Two patterns stand out: digital channels are now the normal route through which a majority of students engage with their institution, and environments rich in social and leadership projects display markedly higher levels of student initiative.

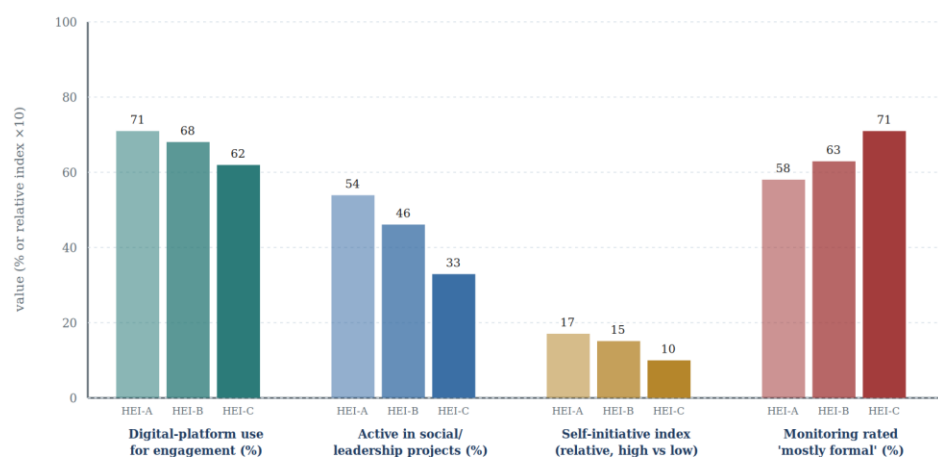
Table 4. Selected indicators of youth-work practice at three Tashkent higher education institutions (aggregated).

Indicator	Observed pattern	Governance interpretation
Use of the institutional digital platform for engagement	A clear majority of students (around two-thirds) use platforms to access news, events and to raise issues	Digital mechanisms are effective and accepted; the channel exists and is trusted
Participation in social and leadership projects	Substantially higher where such projects are embedded in institutional life	Socio-psychological integration shapes the climate for engagement
Student-led initiative	Roughly 1.7 times greater in high-participation than in low-participation environments	Agency is cultivated, not given; it responds to design
Perceived character of monitoring	Indicators present but described as mostly formal; decisions often rest on subjective judgement	The weakest link is evaluation, not activity

Interpretation. Table 4 confirms the diagnosis reached analytically in Section 4.2. The institutions are not short of activity or of digital reach; what they lack is a monitoring layer capable of converting engagement into evidence and evidence into decisions. The 1.7-fold difference in student initiative is particularly instructive, because it shows that engagement is responsive to institutional design and therefore governable — provided the system can see it. The scientific conclusion is that investment should be directed less toward new activities than toward the analytic and feedback capacity that would let existing activity be steered. Figure 4 displays these indicators across the three institutions.

Selected Empirical Indicators from Three Tashkent HEIs

semi-structured interviews, observation and content analysis, 2023-2024 (n = 3 institutions)



The self-initiative index expresses the ~1.7× gap in student-led initiatives between high- and low-participation environments (scaled ×10 for display).

Figure 4. Selected empirical indicators across the three institutions; the self-initiative index expresses the approximately 1.7-fold gap between high- and low-participation environments (scaled for display).

It is worth dwelling on what the rising final pair of bars in Figure 4 represents. The share of respondents who described monitoring as “mostly formal” is highest precisely where it should be lowest, indicating that the maturity of evaluation does not yet track the maturity of digital provision. This visual mismatch — strong adoption, weak measurement — is the empirical signature of the integration gap identified in the literature, and it sets up the framework developed next.

5. An Integrated Governance Framework

The findings converge on a single prescription: connect what already exists. Section 5 translates that prescription into a framework. It proceeds in three steps — first stating the systems logic, then the layered architecture, and finally the maturity model that makes the architecture actionable.

5.1. The systems logic: youth work as an open system

The starting point is to model youth-work governance explicitly as an open system, as shown in Figure 1 below in its layered form and, in process terms, in Figure 2. Inputs — students and their needs, staff, policy, resources, curricula and external partners — are converted, through the management processes of planning, coordination, monitoring and evaluation, into developmental outputs such as professional competencies, civic activity, retention and well-being. The defining feature is the feedback loop that returns evidence about outputs to the planning of inputs, and the system boundary that keeps the institution open and adaptive to a changing environment. This is the abstract engine that the architecture must embody.

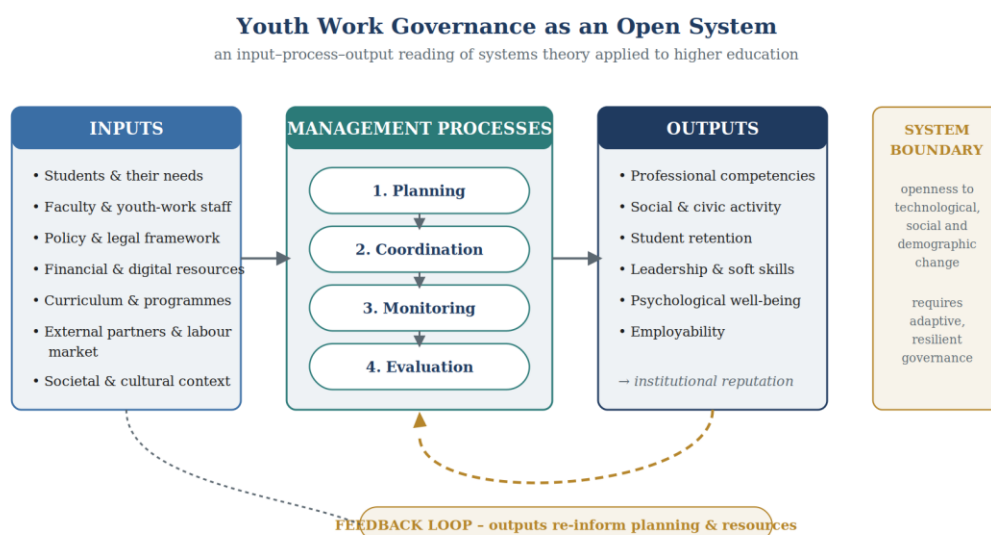


Figure 2. Youth-work governance modelled as an open input–process–output system, with the feedback loop that distinguishes adaptive from reactive management.

5.2. The architecture: integrating institution and data

The Integrated Digital–Institutional Governance (IDIG) framework gives the systems logic a concrete, three-layer form, shown in Figure 1. The strategic layer aligns institutional youth work with national policy and with the institution’s own vision, accountability and legal-normative base. The institutional-architecture layer arranges the four approaches of Table 1 — structural, functional, organisational and innovative — into a coherent design rather than a default. The operational layer houses the three technological directions of Table 2 — digital platforms, socio-psychological services, and monitoring and analytics — as the instruments through which the architecture acts. Crucially, a data-driven feedback loop runs up the side of the model, carrying analytic evidence from the operational layer back into strategic decision-making. The framework’s claim is precisely that no layer is sufficient alone: strategy without architecture is rhetoric, architecture without data is blind, and data without strategy is noise.

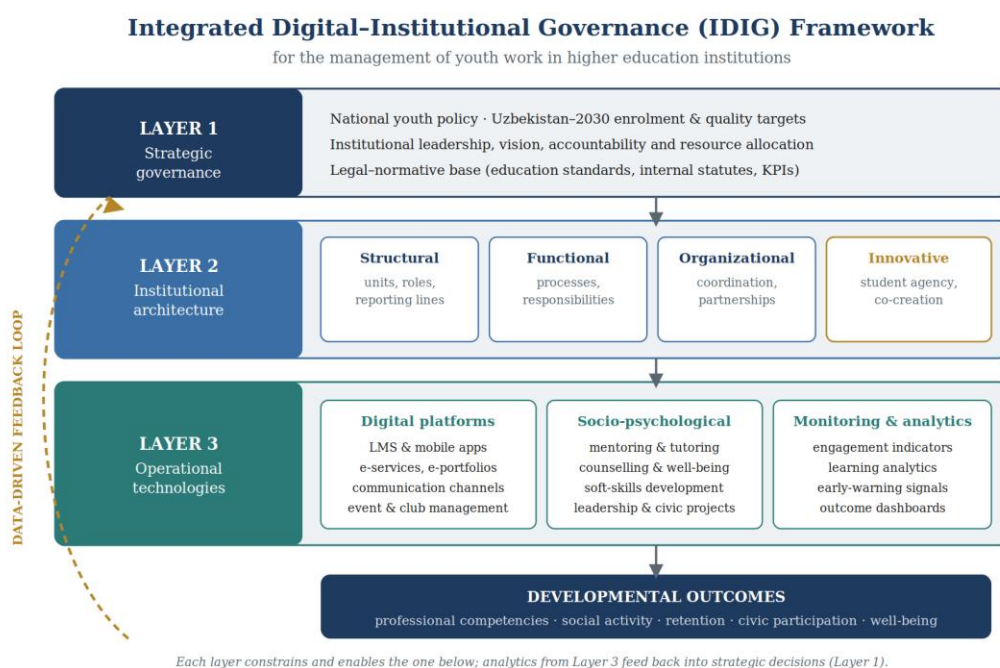


Figure 1. The Integrated Digital–Institutional Governance (IDIG) framework: three layers bound by a data-driven feedback loop, in which each layer enables and constrains the one below.

The contrast between the prevailing condition and the framework’s target is captured in Figure 3. On the left, units operate as disconnected silos with duplicated effort, formal monitoring and ad-hoc decisions; on the right, the same units are organised around a shared governance core and a common data layer, enabling coordinated, evidence-based and continuously adapting practice. The transformation the figure depicts is not the addition of new bodies but the rewiring of existing ones — which is why it is achievable within current resources.

From Fragmented to Integrated Governance of Youth Work

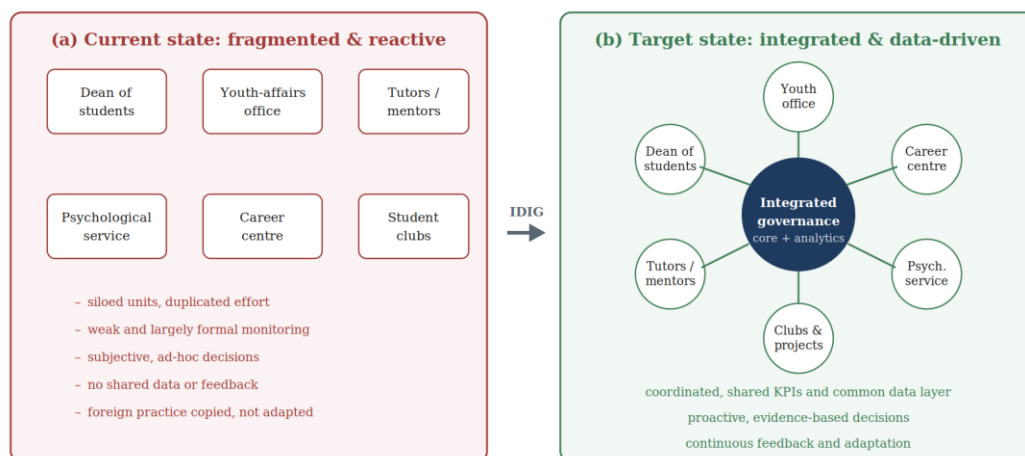


Figure 3. From fragmented, reactive governance (left) to integrated, data-driven governance (right): the same units, differently connected through the IDIG core.

5.3. The Youth-Work Governance Maturity Model

A framework becomes useful when institutions can locate themselves within it and see a path forward. To that end the paper proposes a five-level Youth-Work Governance Maturity Model, summarised in Table 5 and depicted as an ascending staircase in Figure 5. The levels run from fragmented practice, through coordinated and then integrated governance, to data-driven and finally adaptive governance, in which the institution anticipates rather than merely responds. The evidence of Section 4 places most Uzbek institutions between the first and second levels; the IDIG framework is designed to move them to the third level and beyond.

Table 5. The Youth-Work Governance Maturity Model: levels, defining characteristics and the analytic basis of decisions.

Level	Stage	Defining characteristics	Basis of decisions
1	Fragmented	Siloed units, ad-hoc activity, no shared data or feedback	Subjective, reactive
2	Coordinated	Cross-unit calendars, basic reporting, shared events	Partial, episodic evidence
3	Integrated	Single governance core, common digital platform, defined roles	Shared indicators
4	Data-driven	Engagement analytics, KPIs, dashboards and early-warning signals	Routine use of evidence
5	Adaptive	Predictive insight, student co-creation, continuous redesign	Anticipatory, evidence-led

Interpretation. Table 5 converts the framework into a diagnostic. Each ascent is defined not by more spending but by a change in the basis of decisions — from subjective judgement, through shared indicators, to anticipatory, evidence-led governance. The scientific value of the model is twofold: it makes the abstract notion of “integration” measurable, and it specifies the prerequisite of each stage, so that institutions cannot skip the structural and coordinative work that data-driven governance presupposes. Figure 5 renders the same progression as a staircase, emphasising that maturity is climbed step by step.

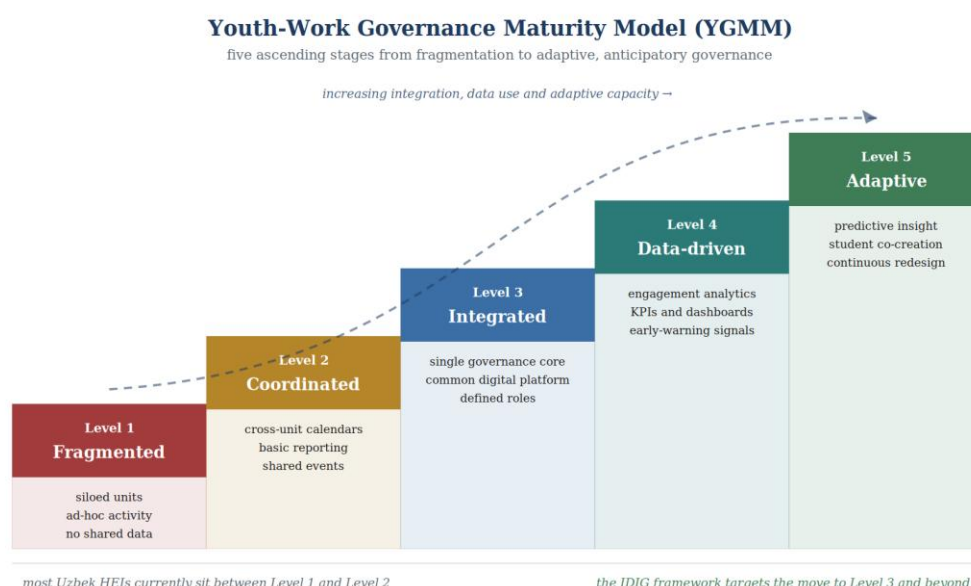


Figure 5. The Youth-Work Governance Maturity Model as an ascending staircase, from fragmentation to adaptive, anticipatory governance.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study set out to convert a scattered field into a single, usable architecture. Its principal conclusion is that the effectiveness of youth-work management in higher education is governed by integration rather than by accumulation: institutions improve when strategy, structure and technology are connected through shared evidence, not when they simply do more. The evidence from three Tashkent institutions — high digital adoption, a 1.7-fold engagement premium where social projects flourish, and a monitoring layer that lags behind both — exemplifies a pattern likely to recur across rapidly expanding systems, and it locates the binding constraint firmly in evaluation rather than in activity.

The paper's contribution is threefold. Theoretically, it unifies the systems-theoretic, institutional and digital strands of the literature that have hitherto developed apart. Practically, it offers the IDIG framework as a design for connecting them. Diagnostically, it provides a maturity model that lets institutions situate themselves and plan their advance. Together these move the conversation from cataloguing instruments to governing them.

From this analysis several recommendations follow.

- 1. Establish a single governance core.** Designate a coordinating function that connects youth-affairs, career, psychological and student-activity units around shared objectives and common indicators, moving the institution from Level 1 to Level 2 of the maturity model.
- 2. Build the monitoring layer deliberately.** Treat engagement analytics as core infrastructure rather than reporting overhead, defining a small set of meaningful

indicators, dashboards and early-warning signals, and pairing them with explicit data-ethics and privacy safeguards.

3. **Use digital platforms for participation, not only notification.** Extend existing systems from one-way announcement toward two-way interaction and participation tracking, so that the trusted channel students already use becomes a source of governable evidence.
4. **Invest in specialised personnel.** Develop dedicated programmes to prepare youth-work managers with the methodological, communicative and analytic competencies the field now requires, since leadership capacity emerged as a decisive success factor.
5. **Adapt international practice conditionally.** Import the practice together with its enabling conditions, following the logic of Table 3, and reject the direct copying of models whose prerequisites are absent.
6. **Govern toward adaptiveness.** Use the maturity model as a rolling self-assessment, setting the realistic near-term goal of reaching Level 3 integration before pursuing the data-driven and adaptive stages.

The study's limitations frame its future. The empirical base is small — three institutions in a single city — and the design is qualitative; the framework's claims are therefore offered as well-grounded hypotheses rather than as established laws. The natural next step is to operationalise the maturity model into a validated instrument and to apply it at scale across the Uzbek system and comparable settings, so that the relationship between governance maturity and student outcomes can be estimated directly. In the meantime, the framework offers institutions a way to see their own practice whole — and to begin connecting what they have already built.

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