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## Theoretical Aspects and European Experience of Formation and Development of Professional Competences of Public Servants

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### ABSTRACT

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The relevance of the study is determined by Ukraine's need to study and implement the best European experience of reforms in education and science, as well as to modernize approaches to the professional training of public servants in the context of European integration, large-scale digitalization, and global challenges of 2025. The purpose of the article is to generalize theoretical approaches and analyze European practices in order to develop recommendations for improving the system of professional training and development of public servants in Ukraine. The article analyzes European experience in applying the competency-based approach to the training, retraining, and advanced professional development of civil servants on the basis of official sources and scientific research. A theoretical generalization and applied analysis of the transformation of professional competency formation systems is conducted, defining competency as a dynamic combination of knowledge, skills, ways of thinking, and moral and ethical values. The historical evolution of the competency-based approach is traced from its origins in the USA and Great Britain in the 1970s–1980s to its institutionalization in Ukraine through the Bologna Process and the laws "On Higher Education" and "On Civil Service." Particular attention is paid to the German experience, characterized by high practicality and structural clarity. The four-level hierarchy of the German public service, educational requirements, and features of professional training are analyzed, including the role of dual education combining university study with practical training in public institutions. The activities of the Federal Academy of Public Administration and the Digital Academy are examined in the context of lifelong learning and modernization programs. The content of modern bachelor's, master's, and PhD programs in public management, administrative informatics, and digital transformation is described. Based on European practice, recommendations for improving educational programs in Ukrainian higher education institutions are proposed. The scientific novelty lies in the systematization of training methods for public servants with an emphasis on digital literacy and leadership development. The practical significance consists in the possibility of implementing German approaches to individualized and differentiated professional development. It is concluded that the competency-based approach is a strategic tool for ensuring institutional resilience, that modern public servants require both legal knowledge and soft skills, and that universities increasingly focus on developing critical thinking and practical application of knowledge.



### KEYWORDS

theory, education and science, public service, formation, professional competencies, European experience.



## Теоретичні аспекти та європейський досвід формування і розвитку професійних компетентностей публічних службовців

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### СТАТТЯ

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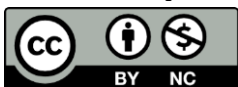
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Актуальність дослідження зумовлена потребою України у вивченні та впровадженні кращого європейського досвіду реформ у сфері освіти й науки, а також необхідністю модернізації підходів до професійної підготовки публічних службовців у контексті євроінтеграції, цифровізації та глобальних викликів 2025 року. Метою статті є узагальнення теоретичних підходів і аналіз європейських практик з метою розроблення рекомендацій щодо вдосконалення системи професійної підготовки та розвитку публічних службовців в Україні. У дослідженні проаналізовано європейський досвід застосування компетентнісного підходу до підготовки, перепідготовки та підвищення кваліфікації державних службовців на основі офіційних джерел і наукових праць. Здійснено теоретичне узагальнення та прикладний аналіз трансформації системи формування професійних компетентностей, визначено компетентність як динамічну комбінацію знань, умінь, способів мислення та цінностей. Простежено еволюцію компетентнісного підходу від його формування у США та Великій Британії у 1970–1980-х роках до впровадження в українське правове поле через Болонський процес і норми законів «Про вищу освіту» та «Про державну службу». Особливу увагу приділено німецькому досвіду, який характеризується практичною спрямованістю та чіткою структурою публічної служби. Проаналізовано чотирирівневу систему публічної служби Німеччини, освітні вимоги та специфіку професійної підготовки, роль дуальної освіти, а також діяльність Федеральної академії публічного управління та Цифрової академії. Охарактеризовано сучасні освітні програми з публічного менеджменту, адміністративної інформатики та цифрової трансформації, а також підготовку наукових кадрів через структуровані PhD-програми. На основі аналізу європейської практики запропоновано рекомендації щодо вдосконалення освітніх програм в Україні. Наукова новизна полягає у систематизації методів підготовки публічних службовців з акцентом на розвиток цифрової грамотності та лідерських якостей. Практичне значення результатів полягає у можливості імплементації німецьких підходів до індивідуалізації та диференціації професійного розвитку державних службовців в Україні.



### КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА

теорія, освіта та наука, публічна служба, формування, професійні компетентності, європейський досвід.

## **1. Introduction**

The introduction of the competency-based approach in the process of training and advanced training of civil servants began in the United States and Great Britain (1970–1980) in order to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the public service. The main advantages of the new approach were considered to be efficiency in achieving tasks, mobility in the transition of employees from the private sector to the public sector and vice versa, and adaptability as an opportunity to adequately respond to new challenges.

The competence approach has been considered in Ukraine since the 1990s, but the transition from scientific discussions to practical implementation took place in the course of Europeanization – the Bologna process and the adaptation of Ukrainian legislation to European standards. The “key competencies” of public servants were discussed already in 2002-2004 within the framework of UNDP projects (“Democratic Governance and Civil Society Development” and others).

The fundamental basis of the competence approach was the National Classification Framework approved by the government [1], which introduced a description of qualification levels to ensure the quality of education. Educational classification is interpreted as “a set of competencies established by the standard of education and acquired by a person and/or learning outcomes”. New Law of Ukraine “On Higher Education” [18]. The result of training determined not the sum of knowledge, but general and professional competencies. Competence is defined as “the ability of a person to successfully socialize, study, conduct professional activities, which arises based on a dynamic combination of knowledge, skills, ways of thinking, views, values, and other personal qualities” [18, para. 13, Art. 1].

This approach was developed in the new Law of Ukraine “On Civil Service” [19], which interprets professional competence as “the ability of a person, within the limits of the powers determined by the position, to apply special knowledge, skills and abilities, to show appropriate moral and business qualities for the proper performance of established tasks and duties, training, professional and personal development” [19].

A significant contribution to the understanding of modern methods of public administration belongs to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Since 2007, official OECD reports have been developing the relevant concept of public administration effectiveness in a period of profound transformations and challenges. space are testing the stability and efficiency of state institutions as never before, which requires the introduction of modern approaches to public administration [12]. Finally, the competency-based approach was entrenched in Ukraine in the course of the education reform (2017-2020, the Law of Ukraine “On Education”, standards for specialties, licensing and accreditation taking into account compliance with these standards, etc.) as a task of expanding the ability of public servants to obtain and use the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities in specific situations.

## **2. Literature Review**

A review of literature sources testifies to the proper attention of Ukrainian scientists to the problems of formation and development of professional competencies of public servants. Since the beginning of the 2000s, it has been mainly about the professionalization of the civil service (N. Kolisnichenko, V. Luhovyi, V. Oluiko, L. Pashko, S. Serohin and others), the ethics of the civil service (T. Vasylevska, M. Rudakevych), the competence of managers (N. Honcharuk, T. Motrenko, I. Surai and others), etc.

In the following years, more attention was paid to innovative approaches to the professional development of civil servants and the implementation of successful foreign practices. For example, M. Lakhyzha and G. Tregubenko [10] investigated the organizational and legal aspects of training, retraining and advanced training of specialists in the field of European integration in post-communist countries. Among the publications of the next period, it is worth highlighting monographs and dissertations: M. Debych [2], Ya. Kachan [8], O. Petroie et al. [13], S. Serohin [14] and I. Shpektorenko [15]. The European experience of professional training of civil servants was the subject of discussion by the Committee of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine [20]. In the same year, within the framework of the EU-UNDP Parliamentary Reform Project, an Expert Paper on the topic: “Models for raising the level of professional competence of civil servants in foreign countries: comparative analysis” was published – a

brief overview on the example of the United Kingdom, France and the United States of America [21]. However, it can be stated that the foreign experience of the competence approach to the training of civil servants has not yet been sufficiently studied. In particular, the specific experience of organizing training requires additional attention: the preparation of educational programs and curricula, the methodology for determining and ensuring the achievement of the necessary competencies and learning outcomes, etc.

### **3. Problem Statement**

Generalization of theoretical approaches and analysis of European practices for the preparation of recommendations for improving the system of professional training and development of civil servants in Ukraine.

The authors studied the experience of the competency-based approach to the training of specialists for the public service system in Bulgaria, Poland and Germany, which was used in the development and improvement of educational programs for civil servants and lawyers at the National University "Yuri Kondratyuk Poltava Polytechnic" (Poltava) and the Academy of Labour, Social Relations and Tourism (Kyiv). This article aims to characterize the German experience and suggest ways to adapt it in Ukraine. The main sources were the official websites of authorities, social institutions and educational institutions.

### **4. Methods and Materials**

The authors used theoretical (comparative analysis, generalization, systematization) and empirical (measurement, comparison) research methods. The main source was official documents and materials of educational and scientific platforms.

### **5. Results and Discussion**

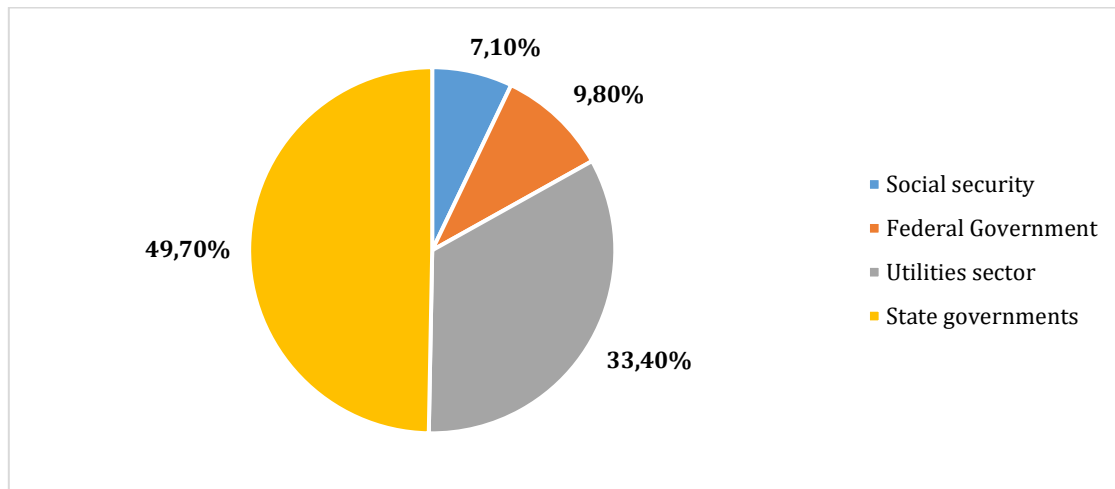
From a theoretical point of view, it is important to note the unanimity in considering the development of professional competencies of public servants as an important task that should be carried out continuously. The conventionality in practice of the difference between the concepts of "professional development" and "increasing the level of professional competence" and the need for interaction of state bodies with educational institutions is noted [16, p. 2]. The general trends are the development of a distance education network; the use of a modular learning principle, which provides greater flexibility; individualization of learning and advanced training; and a focus on the continuity of learning. Digitalization (e-Government) is of particular importance.

It is important to support as much as possible the ability of a public servant to independently choose and assimilate knowledge, skills and abilities in the information society. For universities, the issue of ensuring flexibility in working with students is of particular importance both from the point of view of the organization of education, and from the point of view of the content of educational programs and their methodological content. There is a real competition between the teacher and the sources of instant information (AI, the Internet, etc.). Therefore, it becomes more important not only to transfer knowledge, but also to form the ability to find and analyze and use it. The role of disciplines that help to form the competencies of a leader capable of high-quality communication, quickly navigate the situation, make responsible decisions, etc., is growing.

It is also worth considering the different content of the concept of "public servant". For example, in Germany, this concept covers officials (Beamte – employees of ministries, judges, police officers, customs officers, firefighters, university professors, officers of the armed forces and contract soldiers, teachers of public schools, etc., who have a special status of lifetime appointment with appropriate benefits and restrictions) and other public sector employees (Tarifbeschäftigte – administrative personnel working on the basis of an employment contract).

German statistical reference books provide information on the composition of those employed in the German public service – in mid-2025, there were 5.5 million employees (out of 43.1 million employed), of which 1.8 million were civil servants, and 3.7 million were employees under employment contracts; 2.18 million were men, 3.3 million were women [3; 6; 7].

These data already indicate the complexity of the comparative analysis of the public service in different countries and the organization of its professional development. However, there is a commonality in approaches to determining educational directions and tasks (Figure 1).



**Figure 1. Employed in the German civil service**

Source: Compiled by the authors based on [3; 6; 7].

Accordingly, educational requirements are formed, which provide for a certain basic level of education and professional – educational and practical – training after appointment to the position (Table 1).

**Table 1. Levels of public service in Germany**

Service level	Minimum education level	Educational qualification	Professional training	Typical ranks
<b>Simple service (Einfacher Dienst, auxiliary and technical works)</b>	Primary school	Basic school	On-the-job internship (up to 6 months)	A2–A6
<b>Medium service (Mittlerer Dienst)</b>	Complete secondary education	Vocational education	Vocational training (Vorbereitungsdienst) up to 3 years	A6–A9
<b>Higher secondary service (Gehobener Dienst)</b>	Bachelor’s degree	Bachelor at the fah	Dual studies at specialized universities (Fachhochschule)	A9–A13
<b>Senior service (Hoherer Dienst)</b>	Master’s Degree or State Exam	Master’s Degree, State Exam	Compulsory preparatory service (Referendariat) up to 2 years	A13–A16/ B

Source: Compiled by the authors based on [9].

In our opinion, it is this combination of practicality and accessibility of education that is the essence of the German experience.

Training and advanced training of civil servants are decentralized, taking into account practical needs. After selection to a state body, a public servant is on probation, which provides for specific requirements for the direction and level of their education. Therefore, training is selected for a specific position and career degree of the employee and is paid for by the state. Continuous professional development is not only a right, but also an obligation of a public servant.

The central educational institution for training federal officials is the Federal Academy of Public Administration (BAkÖV), which has a specialized unit for ensuring the digitalization of the public service – the Digital Academy (Digitalakademie). Each of the 16 federal states has its own training institution for public servants (Länderakademien).

The following types of educational process are distinguished: continuing education to actualize knowledge; advanced training (for the purpose of career growth); adaptation training (acquisition of new skills, for example, in the field of digitalization and IT security). In 2025, the Federal Academy of Public Administration has strengthened the implementation of modernization programs, in particular,

through the “Modern State” program, which allows the formation of skills in data analysis, flexible management, the use of artificial intelligence, etc. Combinations of items vary depending on the category of applicants – general administration, police officers, tax officers, customs officers, and others. This is confirmed by the analysis of bachelor’s programs (Table 2).

**Table 2. Common Bachelor’s Degree Programs**

Direction of education	Diploma	Focus
<b>Public administration</b>	Bachelor of Arts (BA)	Classical approach (administrative law and public administration)
<b>Public management</b>	Bachelor of Arts (BA)	Modernized approach (combining knowledge of public administration and entrepreneurship, efficiency and modernization)
<b>General management</b>	Bachelor of Laws (LLB)	In-depth study of law
<b>Administrative Informatics</b>	Bachelor of Science (D.Sc)	Combination of administration and IT (digitalization, e-government)
<b>Law in social security</b>	Bachelor of Laws (LLB)	Specialization for employees in the field of social protection

Source: Compiled by the authors based on [9].

A variant of preparation for public service is dual training programs (Der “Königsweg”), which involve a combination of practical activities and interdisciplinary training (50-60% law, as well as economics, social sciences and management). Usually, such programs are available in specialized universities, partially in open universities of economics, law, applied sciences, etc.

The choice of educational institutions and programs is facilitated by the presence of several large portals for applicants, students and graduates. For example, the StudyCheck portal [17] contains information about universities and specialized higher schools, distance and dual education, educational programs, and offers an annual ranking of universities based on the reviews of their students, etc. Portal “Educational Programs in Public Administration” [4] informs higher educational institutions, terms of study, educational programs, etc. Among the most popular are Business Administration, International Business Administration, Public Administration, Health Protection, and Occupational Safety.

In Ukraine, this experience has also been applied; in particular, the functioning of the Knowledge Management Portal allows public servants to choose educational programs, for example, a master’s degree, to choose advanced training programs in thematic areas.

However, the portal of German universities emphasizes (section “Public Administration and Public Service Studies”) [11], public administration and public service programs in Germany prepare students to participate in improving the work of state institutions, territorial self-government bodies and public organizations. These programs combine theoretical knowledge of law, political science and management with practical training through internships, case studies and real projects. Students learn how to develop and implement policies, manage administrative processes, and teams to deliver effective public services. Due to Germany’s strong tradition of good governance and its role at the heart of the European Union, these programs provide valuable information about working both nationally and internationally in the public sector.

Information about master’s educational programs (Master Öffentliche Verwaltung) is also useful, among them: Public Management, Public Administration, Digital Transformation, Political Management, Management of Organizations, Management of Regional Innovation Ecosystems and others. Thus, the program “Public Administration” at the German State University of Administrative Sciences Speyer has a standard duration of four semesters and ends with a master’s degree arts. The program is offered as a full-time form of study. It was noted that it was tested twice with high marks. The categories of course content, faculty and organization received particularly high marks. The MBA program in part-time public administration at the Remagen campus (a branch of the Kombleneck University of Applied Sciences) develops the competencies of applicants for managerial positions in the public sector. Focusing on modern administrative management, the online MBA program combines a thorough knowledge of business administration with specialized public administration experience. Competencies for purposeful management of administrative structures and their formation for the future are being developed – from the processes of digital transformation to the concepts of sustainable development of

the organization in the context of social challenges [17]. Hence, the focus of master's programs is to specialize in certain fields.

For the training of scientists in the field of public administration and administration, PROMOTION is provided – the process of obtaining the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD). The most popular is individual doctoral studies, which involves independent work under the scientific supervision of a professor of a certain department. There are also structured PhD programs, similar to Ukrainian or American ones – with a clear study plan, seminars, and groups of students. Analysis of information from several universities that train PhDs in Public Administration (Deutsche Universität für Verwaltungswissenschaften Speyer), University of Potsdam, Private University (Hertie School) (Berlin) and others indicates the use of German and English, careful choice of research topic (relevance, methodology, expected results). For example, a structured 3-year program of a Private University involves participation in seminars and the development of a methodology during the first year and the conduct of the study in the next two years. A similar approach is taken at Speyer University, which implements training programs for doctors of management sciences (Doctor rerum publicarum) and doctors of social and economic sciences.

As a rule, tuition payment is made through well-known funds (DAAD – German Academic Exchange Service, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung – Konrad Adenauer Foundation and others), funds of political parties or through filling a vacancy of a researcher at the university.

It should be noted that there is a noticeable increase in attention to digital literacy. As in Ukraine (CDTO Campus project), in Germany, there is a Federal Digital Academy (Digitalakademie Bund), the main educational areas of which are the provision of digital competencies, digital cultural transformation and networking (Networking). The Federal Digital Academy was founded in 2021 as part of the Federal Academy of the Federal Ministry of the Interior (BMI) and is positioned as a platform for digital literacy. qualifications under the Federal Government [5]. The Academy uses a hybrid model of training specialists: Ambassadors of Change (a 6-month program of combining training and preparation of real change projects for their department; involves the development of design thinking, mastering the psychology of change, studying the necessary flexible methods); specialized seminars on Project Management in the Public Sector (legal literacy, the use of AI and cloud technologies); short video modules on individual issues (digital leadership, teamwork) etc.). The philosophy of such training is focused on the development of digital thinking and the introduction of digital competencies into job descriptions. It is important to phase out the learning process – the student's self-diagnosis through passing a digital skills test, developing a plan and implementing it together with teachers and colleagues.

## **6. Conclusions**

A comparative analysis of the experience of using the competency-based approach to the professionalization of public servants allows us to formulate a number of conceptual conclusions. Firstly, it is proven that the competence approach is not just an educational methodology, but a strategic tool for ensuring the stability of state institutions in the context of limited fiscal space and demographic changes. It has been established that a modern public servant must have not only legal knowledge, but also soft skills, the ability to quickly adapt and analyze large amounts of data.

Secondly, the analysis of the German model of public service and the system of its educational provision demonstrated the effectiveness of a decentralized system of professional development, where training is selected for a specific position and career degree. The key advantage of the German experience is the mandatory continuing education and the active use of dual education, which minimizes the gap between theoretical training at the university and the practical requirements of the workplace. For Ukraine, it is promising to borrow the model of the “preparatory service” (Referendariat) and create specialized digital platforms for self-diagnosis of competencies.

Thirdly, it is determined that in the conditions of the information society, the role of universities is transformed from the simple transfer of knowledge to the formation of the ability to critically analyze and use it. The priority areas for the development of educational programs should be administrative informatics, cybersecurity and crisis management. The implementation of the experience of the German Federal Digital Academy in training “ambassadors of change” can become an effective mechanism for accelerating reforms in the Ukrainian public sector.

Further scientific research in this direction should be focused on the development of specific criteria for assessing the effectiveness of investments in the professional development of public servants

and the study of the impact of artificial intelligence on changing the professional profiles of positions in the state apparatus. The creation of a flexible, innovative and practice-oriented training system is the key to Ukraine's successful European integration.

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