



Inspecting Universities from an External Perspective: A Four-Dimensional Framework and Practical Approaches

Desheng Wei

Hefei University of Technology, Hefei, Anhui, China

Abstract: Based on external university inspection and practice, this paper builds a four-dimensional analytical framework, expounds the upgrade paths of inspection work from problem identification to symptom-and-root-cause resolution and from tactical execution to strategic support. It clarifies the practical principles of university inspection with the Three Must Not and cases, and puts forward unconventional thinking approaches from policy guidance, social contribution and long-term governance. The study aims to guide universities to improve governance efficiency and achieve the mission of moral education through inspection.

Keywords: university inspection; four-dimensional perspective; thinking upgrade; practical approaches

1. Introduction

Inspection is considered as an important mechanism for institutional oversight and a strategic and institutional arrangement for promoting self-improvement and implementing comprehensive and rigorous management. As an integral part of broader supervisory system, university inspection extends oversight to the grassroots and has evolved from error-correcting to integrating with governance modernization in the contemporary era. External-perspective university inspections focus on grasping the essence of institutional oversight, integrating multi-dimensional resources, utilizing outcomes for long-term development, and embodying the people-centered philosophy, shifting from individual problem identification to overall governance efficiency and from phased tasks to strategic pillars within national public governance context.

2. Four-Dimensional Analysis of External-Perspective University Inspection

2.1 Mission Supervision Height: A Litmus Test for Upholding Core Public Policies

Inspection, essentially a form of institutional oversight, focuses on key areas, evaluates how national development strategies translate into discipline planning and talent training, and addresses root causes such as insufficient integration of institutional system into governance[1].

2.2 Supervision System Perspective: A Hub for Collaborative Governance

Inspection is not solo operation but a key link integrating with other supervision forms to form a cohesive force. An external perspective requires breaking supervision fragmentation and building an integrated comprehensive supervision framework:

- (1) Vertical coordination among national education authorities, regional education work committees, university governing bodies and departmental units.
- (2) Horizontal collaboration with discipline oversight, auditing and organizational departments plus joint efforts with local inspection agencies.
- (3) Closed-loop management that turns inspection findings into institutional norms to drive reform via rectification.

2.3 Historical Logic Dimension: Inheriting the Tradition of Self-Revolution

The inspection system has profound historical origins and practical foundations.

(1) Historical Roots: University supervision has evolved from institutional checks in the early modern period to teaching order supervision in later phases, and now centers on supervision of fostering holistic development in the contemporary era—extending from focusing on enrollment fairness in earlier decades to institutional integrity today.

(2) Practical Significance: As a mobile monitoring mechanism, inspection addresses emerging risks such as academic misconduct and irregular enrollment, preventing minor issues from escalating into major risks.

2.4 Stakeholder Stance Perspective: A Bridge Connecting with Faculty and Students

The vitality of inspection lies in being close to and relying on the community.

(1) Public Priorities as the Compass: Inspection priorities center on faculty and students' urgent concerns. Via on-site research, interviews, and digital reporting, supervision extends to all campus life aspects.

(2) Rectification Outcomes as the Benchmark: Inspection results must be publicly disclosed and subject to public scrutiny. Superficial rectification faces strict accountability, with successful practices promoted[2].

3. Key Drivers for the Upgrade of Inspecting Universities from an External Perspective

Inspection work must upgrade from problem identification to problem-solving & governance promotion and from tactical execution to strategic support:

(1) Must Not Put the Cart before the Horse: Respecting the laws of teaching and research by adopting flexible inspection methods to avoid interfering with normal academic activities.

(2) Must Not Allow Laypeople to Inspect Experts: Establishing specialized inspection teams with expertise to ensure professional judgments aligned with industry practices.

(3) Must Not Prioritize Punishment over Education: Providing guidance and training for unintentional errors while strictly addressing intentional violations.

3.1 Inspection Practice at a Top-Tier University

The inspection team moved beyond conventional equipment procurement compliance checks to focus on research resource allocation efficiency. It identified decentralized college-level management as the core issue: 23 labs purchased 86 sets of large-scale instruments with an average annual utilization rate of only 28%. Some high-end microscopes were used less than 50 times per year.

In response, the team promoted a university-wide large-scale instrument sharing platform. Post-rectification outcomes:

(1) Equipment utilization rate stabilized at 76%.

(2) Annual maintenance cost savings of about 1.9584 million yuan.

(3) 32% year-on-year reduction in equipment procurement budget.

Core equipment performance: Spectrometers' annual operating hours increased from 400 to 1,100, supporting 15 high-quality papers; centrifuges facilitated 5 regional-level research projects.

3.2 Innovative Inspection Practices at an Art College

Targeting corruption risks in specialty admissions, the team analyzed applicant petitions and identified fixed examiners and unsubstantiated scoring criteria as key issues. A tripartite supervision system was established.

Table 1. Rectification effectiveness

Indicator	Pre-Inspection (2021)	Post-Inspection (2023)	Change Magnitude
Number of Enrollment-Related Petitions (cases)	30	3	Decreased by 90%
Random Examiner Selection Rate (%)	0	100	Increased by 100%
Applicant Satisfaction Rate (%)	62	95	Increased by 33 percentage points

Post-inspection petitions shifted to inquiries, and practices were incorporated into the 2023 revised Enrollment Work Standards.

4. Practical Approaches to Breaking Free from Conventional Thinking in University Inspection

Inspecting universities from an external perspective emphasizes re-examining inspection's essence, positioning, and value through macro and systematic thinking.

4.1 Optimizing Internal Governance: From Operational Compliance to Policy Guidance and Long-Term Safeguards

Focus on cultivating talents for societal needs; inspect the integration of holistic education into talent development. Guard against the myth that universities are pure academic sanctuaries; tackle research fund misuse and academic power rent-seeking.

4.2 Extending External Value: From Internal Management to Serving Broader Strategies

Link inspection with institutional development priorities to break disciplinary barriers and reform evaluation systems overly focused on publications. Inspect universities' fulfillment of responsibilities in key core technologies and regional development.

4.3 Methodological and Ecological Support: From Traditional Supervision to Innovation and Cultural Empowerment

Construct an integrated inspection-audit-internal control network. For high-risk areas, establish a problem list → system revision → process reengineering closed loop. One university reformed research fund management:

Table 2. Reformed research fund management

Rectification Dimension	Pre-Rectification Status	Post-Rectification Status	Improvement Magnitude
Approval Process	10 steps (Principal Investigator Application → College Review → Research Office Approval → Finance Office Recheck, etc.)	2 core steps: Principal Investigator Commitment + Post-hoc Audit	70% reduction in steps
Processing Time	Average of 1 month	Maximum of 3 working days	90% reduction in processing time
Abnormal Expenditure Alerts	Manual checks, 35% annual omission risk	Big data monitoring platform, 92% alert accuracy	88% reduction in risk
Faculty Satisfaction	42% (main complaint: cumbersome processes)	89%	112% increase in satisfaction

Address academic administration contradictions by promoting core principles for fair evaluation. For flawed title evaluations, a university established random evaluator selection, anonymous review plus external review, increasing young teachers' application enthusiasm by 40%.

Adopt innovative approaches:

(1) Data-Driven Inspection: Leverage big data to analyze abnormal indicators. One university identified a college directing 80% of equipment procurement to a single supplier, prompting a full-process supervision system.

(2) Faculty-and-Student Participatory Inspection: Establish a student observer system. Ten student observers identified canteen issues, leading to a cost disclosure system and student supervision committee—food prices reduced by 15%, satisfaction from 58% to 90%.

5. Conclusion

Inspecting universities from an external perspective represents a shift from isolated problem-solving to systematic thinking, from task fulfillment to institutional responsibility, and from supervision restriction to governance empowerment. By adhering to the four-dimensional framework—mission supervision height, supervision systematic perspective, historical depth, and stakeholder stance—inspection can achieve a qualitative leap from formal coverage to effective coverage. Ultimately, it serves as a powerful guarantee for advancing comprehensive institutional improvement in universities, ensuring the fulfillment of their mission of cultivating high-quality talents for societal needs.

References

- [1] Xu, T. X. (2025). Innovative achievements and deepening paths of the up-down linkage of inspections in the new era. *Xianxiao Academy*.
- [2] Wu, J. S. (2017). The practical logic and institutional improvement of grassroots inspections. *Truth Seeking*, (10), 28-38.

Author Bio

Desheng Wei (1978—), male, Master; Hefei University of Technology.