

Ireland

This report describes the structure of the national higher education system in Ireland, focusing on the institutional types as defined by national categories. It builds on the Eurydice Report on the national higher education system but complements it with quantitative information on the role of higher education institution (HEI) types in national systems, based on data derived from the European Tertiary Education Register (<http://www.eter-project.eu>) for the period 2012-2019, i.e. although the publication date of this report is June 2022, all of its data and content relates to the higher education landscape in Ireland in 2019.

Types of Higher Education Institutions

The Irish higher education system comprises four types of HEIs:

- Universities
- Institutes of technology
- Specialist colleges
- Technological university

Ireland's higher education system is principally a binary system with Universities and Institutes of technology (IoT) (note that Eurydice does not list Technological universities as separate category)¹. There are seven State-supported Universities in Ireland. The National University of Ireland has four constituent Universities at Dublin, Cork, Galway and Maynooth which are largely independent under the Universities Act of 1997. The University of Dublin with its single college, Trinity College, is the oldest established university (1592). The other two established universities are the University of Limerick and Dublin City University.

During the 1960s Ireland built up a binary higher education system. Since that time the non-university sector has grown and is regarded as being highly successful. In 2019, there were 11 Institutes of technology (IoTs), located throughout the country. The other Institutes of technology are located in Athlone, Carlow, Cork, Dundalk, Galway-Mayo, Letterkenny, Limerick, Sligo, Tralee, Waterford, and Dun Laoghaire. Most of these Institutes evolved from Regional Technical Colleges, having been awarded their new titles in 1998.

The institutes provide a comprehensive range of courses including craft and apprentice programmes, higher technical and technological education through two-year Higher Certificate, three-year Ordinary Bachelor Degree, and four-year Honours Bachelor Degrees. The institutes also provide a range of postgraduate programmes at Postgraduate Diploma, Master's, and Doctoral level. The programmes of study offered in some institutions may include a period of work outside the institution as part of the course of study. The institutes also play an important role in providing for recurrent educational needs by way of part-time and evening courses, as well as catering for continuing professional education. Details of all courses in Higher Education appear in the EU Student Handbook. Note that following a new enactment of legislation in 2018, the various

¹<https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/ireland/types-higher-education-institutions-0>

Institutes of technology began a merger process to create five technological universities, one of which has already been established.

No formal distinctions exist regarding qualifications from the non-university and the university sectors. Specialist Colleges include Colleges of Education and National College of Art and Design. The Colleges of Education are devoted predominantly to teacher education of primary and post-primary teachers although, in recent years, some of the colleges offer general degrees and postgraduate studies. NCAD provides a range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in Design, Fine Art, Education, and Visual Culture. The colleges of education and NCAD are closely linked to universities either as Recognised Colleges or as Associated Colleges. Accordingly, their academic and quality assurance procedures come within the university framework and follow its patterns. These colleges benefit from State support (recurrent grant and undergraduate free fees). Their academic awards are made by the relevant university.

Main institutional characteristics. Legal status and the right to award a PhD

Table 1 provides a quantitative overview of the main institutional characteristics for the four public Irish HEI types. In total there are 22 public HEIs established in Ireland. Ireland also has a number of independent private providers of higher education. The seven Universities and the Technological University Dublin are all PhD awarding. The same is the case for the majority of the Colleges and the Institutes of technology with only one in each of the categories being non-PhD awarding.

Table 1. Institutional type and legal status by HEI type, 2019

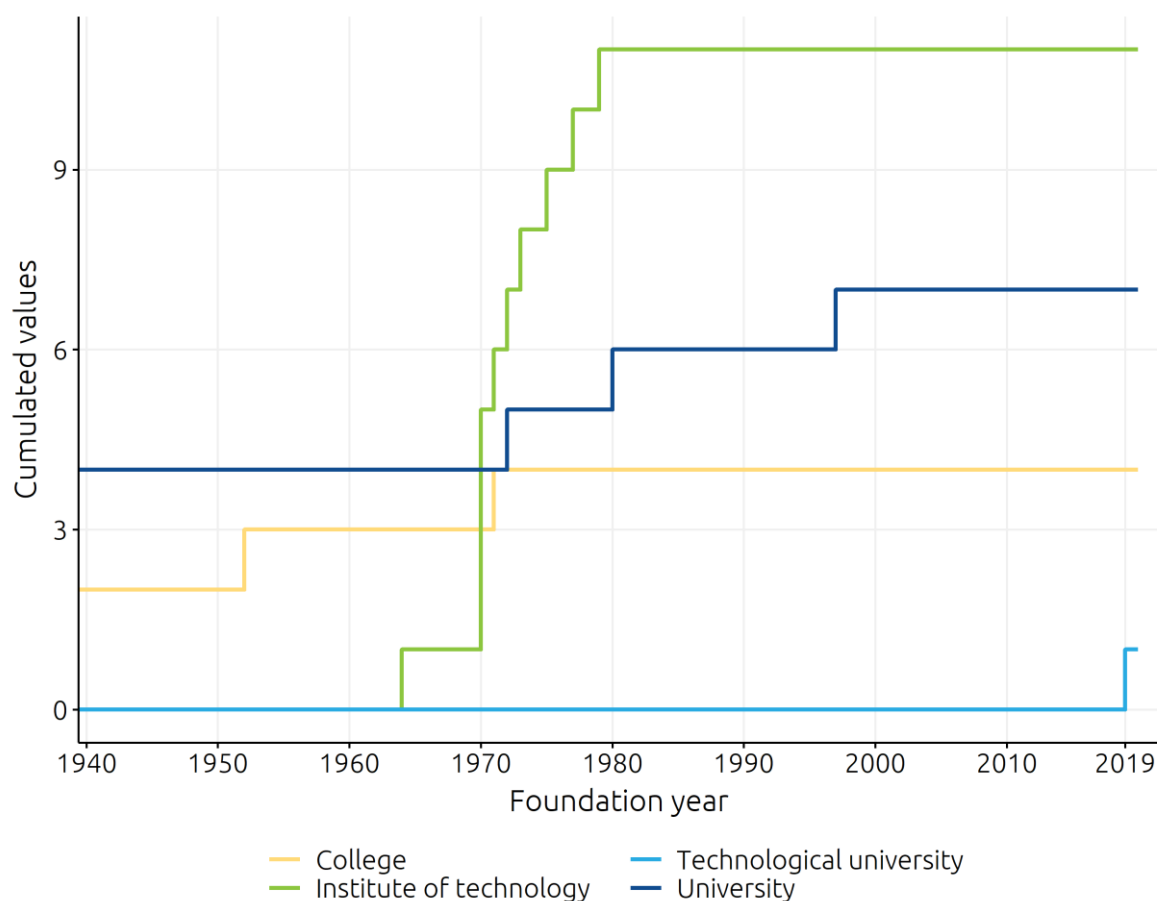
Category	N	Public	PhD awarding
College	4	4	3
Institute of technology	11	11	10
Technological university	1	1	1
University	7	7	7
Total	23	22	21

Institutional history. Older and younger institutional types

Data on the HEI foundation year provide information on the history of the evolution of the Irish HE system over time. Figure 1 overleaf shows that Universities and Colleges have rather deep historical roots, with the University of Dublin and its only College, the Trinity College, being the oldest established University (1592). Three further universities as well as one college were founded before the second World War. One University was established in the 1970s, one in the 1980s and the last one in 1997 (Maynooth University). The Technological university Dublin (TU Dublin) was formally established on January 1, 2019, resulting from a merger of three Institutes of technology. Institutes of technology became present in Ireland in the 1960s

increasing steeply between 1964 (establishment of the Institute of technology, Carlow as the first one) and 1979 (Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology as the last).

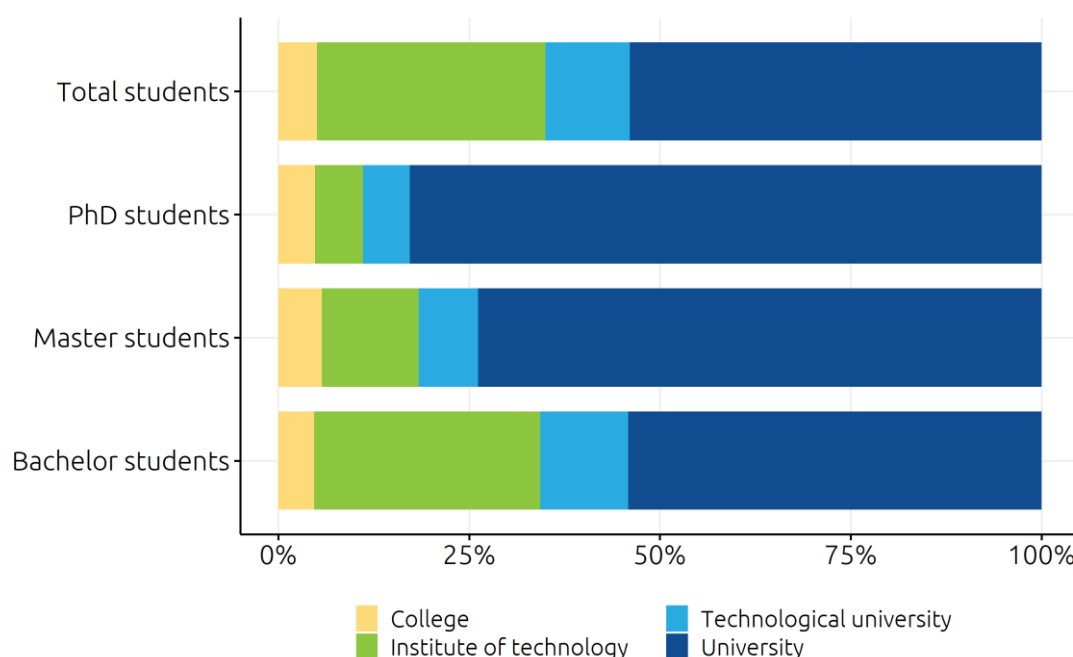
Figure 1. Foundation year of HEIs by type



How are students distributed?

Figure 2 provides an overview on the numbers of students enrolled, disaggregated by ISCED level across the main institution types. Universities account for about 50% of total students, and are attended by the vast majority of PhD students (more than 75%). Institutes of technology, the largest group in terms of the number of institutions, account for about a quarter of total students, which are mostly Bachelor students. The number of Master and PhD students enrolled in IoTs is much lower. The four colleges – about 17% of total institutions in terms of establishments – account for less than 10% of students, though quite equally distributed across ISCED levels. The Technology University (TU Dublin) accounts for a remarkably high share of students (more than 10%).

Figure 2. Students by level and type of HEI, 2019



Note: Total students includes ISCED 5-7

Academic personnel and financial resources

Figure 3 underlines the results from the previous section, showing that in the year 2019 Universities accounted not only for the majority of students enrolled, but also for the majority of total academic personnel (also about 50%). Also the share of total revenues for Universities is the largest among all HEIs with around 70%. This may be related to the fact that Universities play a much stronger role in the acquisition of third party funds and student fees (Figure 4). In contrast, Institutes of technology show a comparably low share of total revenues, both when compared to the share of the number of students and academic personnel. Colleges have the lowest share both in total revenues and academic personnel, which is also relatively lower when compared to their share of total students. The ratio of academic personnel to the number of students is accordingly lowest for Colleges across the HEI types observed. Comparing Universities and Institutes of technology in terms of their composition of resources, the most striking result is the comparably low share of core budget in total resources for Universities accounting only for slightly more than 10% of total resources. Even in absolute numbers, the core budget for Universities is only slightly higher than the one for the Institutes of technology.

Figure 3. Resources, academic personnel and total students enrolled by type of HEI, 2019

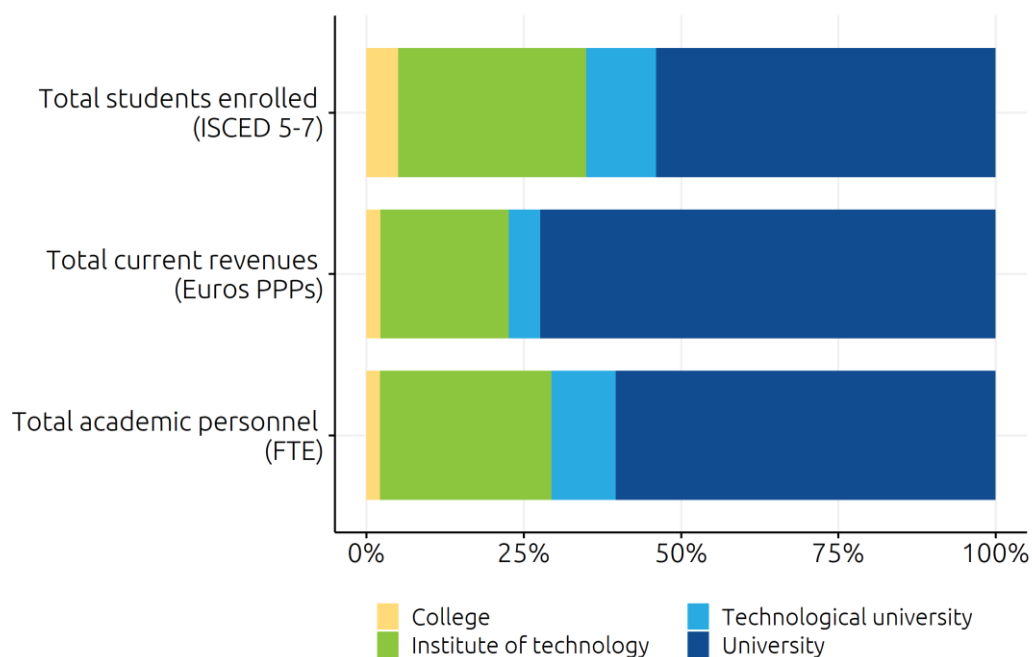
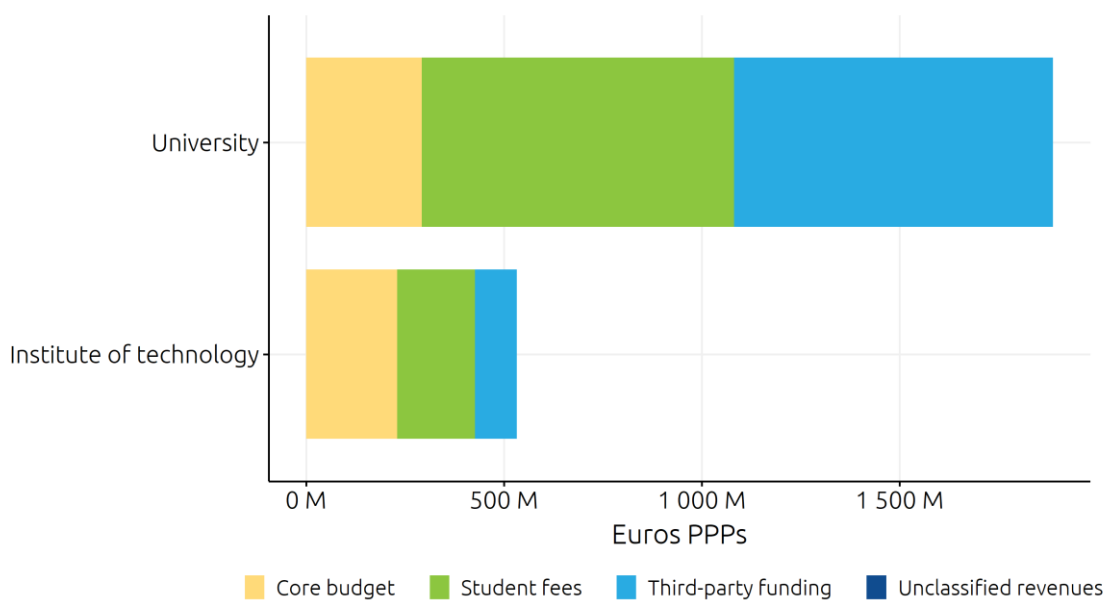


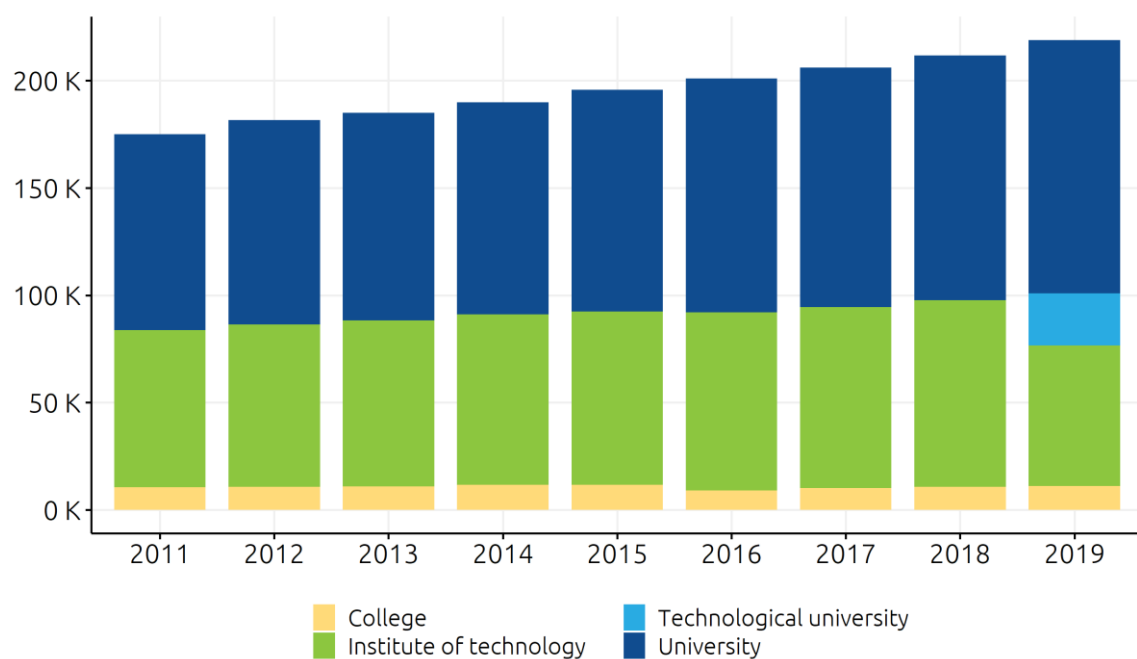
Figure 4. Composition of resources. Universities and Institutes of technology



Changing roles over time

When observed through the lens of the number of students, data show a steadily increasing pattern with the number of enrolled students increasing by around 18% between 2011 and 2019. The share of the increase is by and large equally distributed across the three main categories of the Irish HE system. In the year 2019, the Technological university (TU Dublin) has been introduced to the system, but as a merger of three Institutes of Technology. Accordingly this has not dramatically changed the total number of students, but rather affected the internal shares between these two types.

Figure 5. Share of students enrolled by institutional type





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