



## Italy

This report describes the structure of the national higher education system in Italy, 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 2011-2019.

### Types of Higher Education Institutions

According to Eurydice<sup>1</sup>, the Italian higher education system comprises four main types of HEIs:

- Universities (polytechnics included)
- Institutions of High Education in the Arts and Music (Alta formazione artistica e musicale - AFAM)
- Higher technical institutes (ITS) (not part of ETER perimeter)
- Higher schools for language mediators (Scuole superiori per mediatori linguistici - SSML) (not part of ETER data collection)

Universities (polytechnics included) and equivalent institutions, Institutions of High Education in the Arts and Music (AFAM) are higher education institutions that issue first, second and third-cycle qualifications. ITSs only offer short courses. A list of all institutions is available on the website of the Ministry of University and Research (MUR). In addition, MUR has launched the portal [universitaly.it](http://universitaly.it) that, beside the list of all institutions, provides all necessary information to access higher education in Italy. For the empirical insights that follow, we mobilize the more detailed ETER classification, disaggregating universities and AFAM to the following subcategories

- Universities
  - University
  - Technical university
  - Foreigner's university
  - Online university
  - Higher School (*Scuola Superiore*)
- AFAM
  - Fine Arts Academies
  - Music Conservatories
  - The National Dance Academy
  - The National Drama Academy
  - Higher Institutes for Applied Arts

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<sup>1</sup>[https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/types-higher-education-institutions-39\\_en](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/types-higher-education-institutions-39_en)

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

Table 1 below provides a quantitative overview of the main institutional characteristics by HEI type. Universities (*Università*) are mostly public institutions and have the right to award PhDs (with one exception). In total, about half of all Italian HEIs are Universities and equivalent institutions. Pure technical universities (*Politecnico*) do play a minor role in comparison to the whole university sector (though just in terms of the number of institutions and not in terms of the number of students enrolled, see below). The other half is comprised of high level arts and music education (AFAM), none of them PhD awarding. Within AFAM, music conservatories (*Istituto superiore di studi musicali*) are the most important HEI accounting for almost 35% of all Italian HEIs, though none of them awards PhDs. About one quarter of all HEIs in Italy, mostly universities (15) or music conservatories (18), are private.

Table 2. Institutional type and legal status by HEI type, 2019

Category			N	Public	Private	PhD awarding
Universities	Online University	Università telematica	11	0	11	4
	Technical University	Politecnico	3	3	0	3
	University	Università	75	58	15	74
	University For Foreigners	Università per stranieri	3	2	1	3
	Higher School	Scuola Superiore	6	6	0	6
AFAM	Fine Arts Academy	Accademia di belle arti	29	20	9	0
	Higher Institutes for Applied Arts	Istituto superiore industrie artistiche	5	5	0	0
	Music Conservatory	Istituto superiore di studi musicali (Conservatorio di musica)	73	55	18	0
	The National Dance Academy	Accademia Nazionale di Danza	1	1	0	0
	The National Drama Academy	Accademia Nazionale di Arte Drammatica	1	1	0	0
Total			207	151	49	90

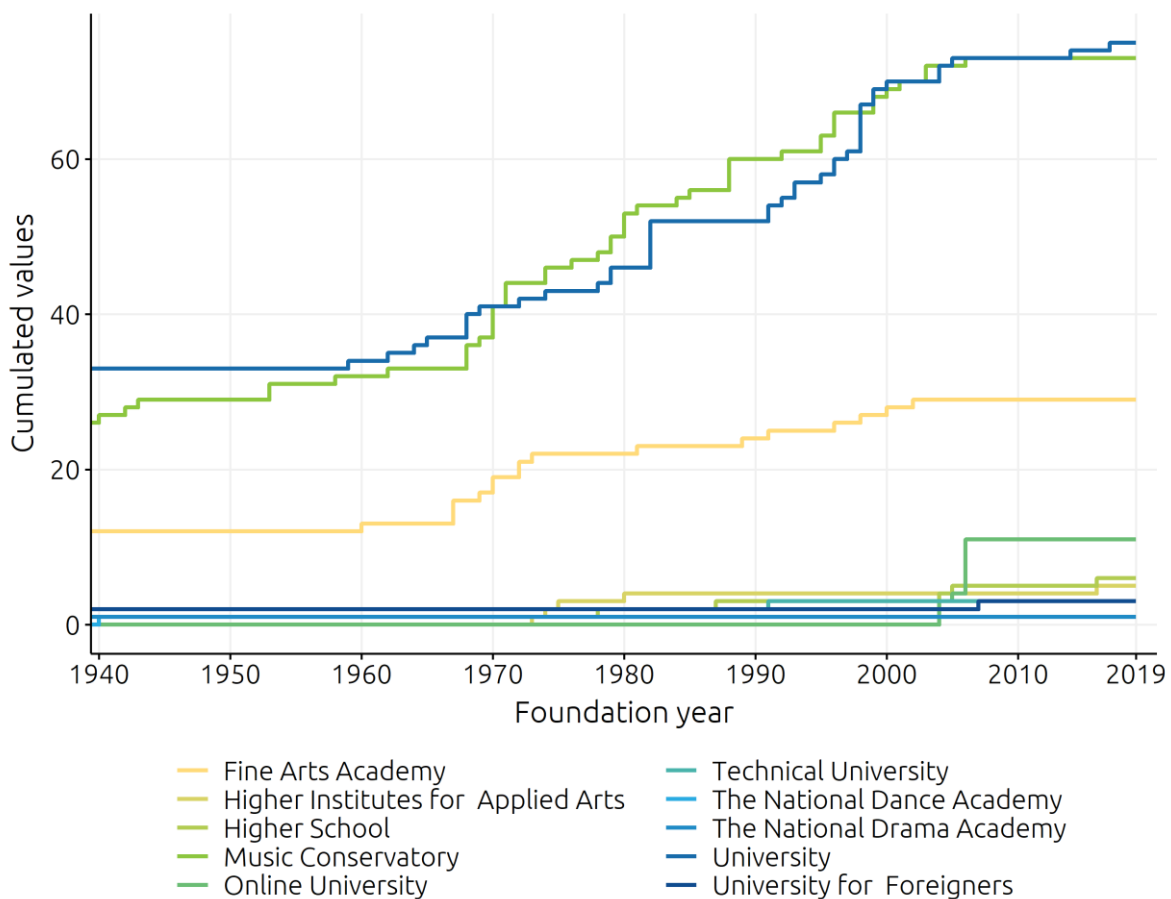
Note: Numbers reflect inclusion in ETER

## Institutional history. Older and younger institutional types

Data on the HEI foundation year provide information on the history of Italy's higher education and its evolution over time.

Figure 1 shows that Italy is characterised by immense historical roots, with already a large number of HEIs being established before 1940 (around 50%). The University of Bologna is not only the oldest university in Italy, but in Europe as a whole. Also for the other categories, very early foundation years can be detected, with many fine arts academies (*Accademia di belle arti*) being established already in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and higher schools (*Scuola Superiore*) and music conservatories (*Istituto superiore di studi musicali*) from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Looking at the past century, we can identify no additional university establishments between the second World War and the early 1960s, but a steady growth afterwards until 2019. A similar pattern can be identified for the second most important category, i.e. music conservatories (*Istituto superiore di studi musicali*).

Figure 1. Foundation year of HEIs by type

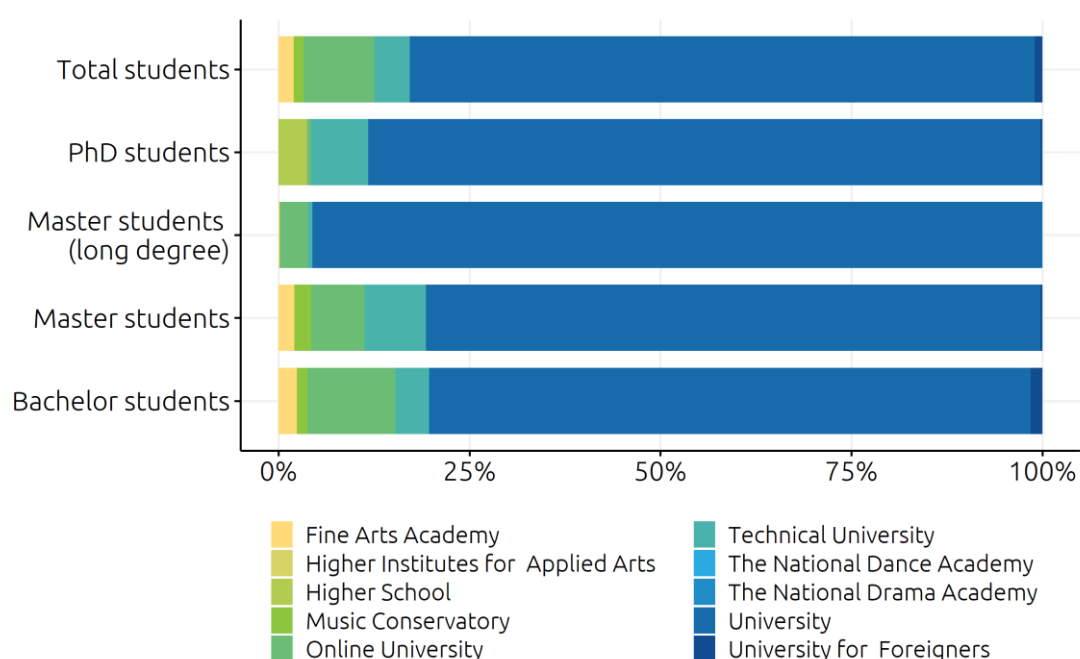


## How are students distributed?

In terms of the number of students enrolled, universities account for the vast majority of all students (more than 80% while just 36% in terms of number of institutions). The other institutional types play a relatively minor role in the aggregate (see Figure 2). When we disaggregate by students level, it can be seen that the role of

universities is even more pronounced in terms of enrolled students for master students, long master's degrees and doctorates' enrolments. The relative importance is somewhat lower for the bachelor level. The second most important category in terms of the number of institutions, the music conservatories (Istituto superiore di studi musicali), just accounts for about 2% of total students.. Accordingly, these are rather small HEIs in terms of student enrolment. Interestingly, the second most important category in terms of students enrolled are online universities, accounting for almost 10% of total students enrolled. The vast majority of students attending online universities are enrolled at the bachelor level and only very few at the PhD level. With about 5% of total students enrolled, technical universities that are only a minor fraction in terms of the number of institutions have a very high number of students, in particular at the PhD level.

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

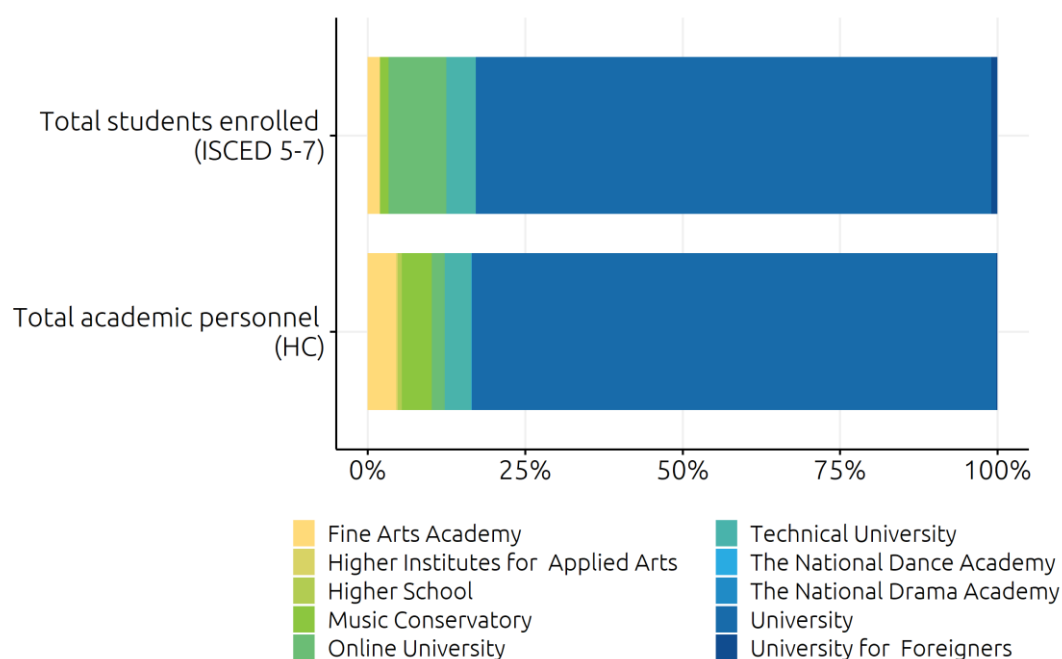


Note: Total students includes ISCED 5-7

## Academic personnel and financial resources

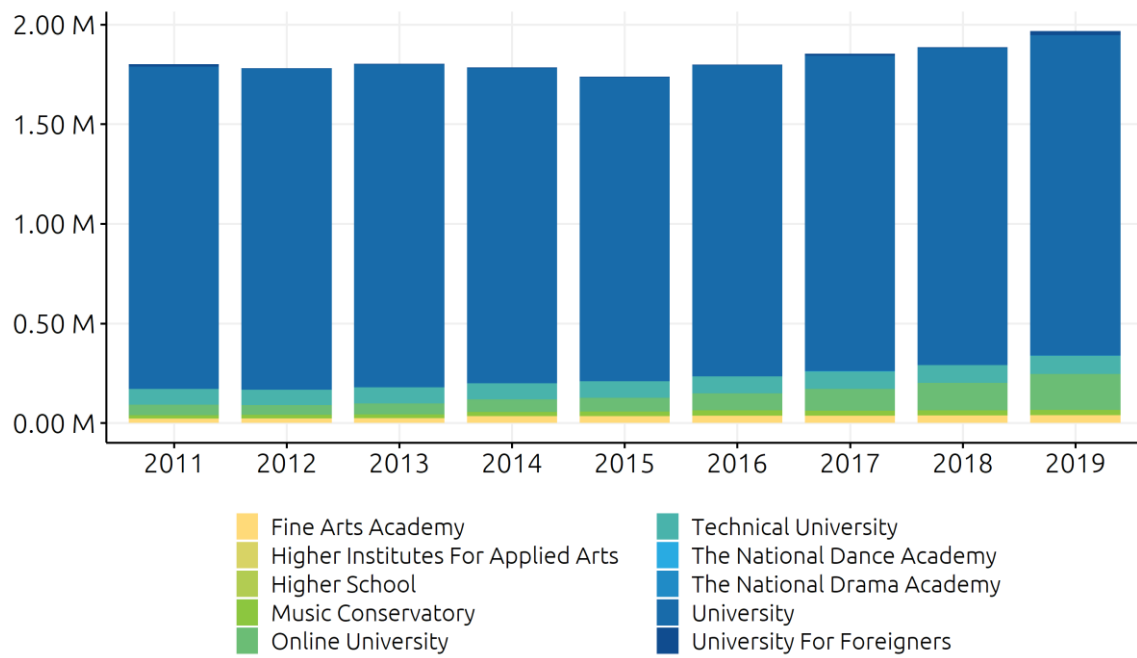
Figure 3 underlines the crucial role of universities, featuring not only the by far highest share of total students enrolled, but also a high number of total academic staff (2019). An interesting observation in this respect is the relatively higher number of academic staff (head count) for the AFAM Institutions in comparison to their comparably low number of students enrolled, i.e. the academic staff to student ratio is very higher for these categories. Exactly the opposite is the case for online universities, featuring a much higher number of students in comparison to the total academic staff.

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



## Changing roles over time

Looking at changes over time in terms of the number of students enrolled, data show a stable trend between 2011 and 2015, followed by an increasing trend after 2015, with a steady and rather constant increase of students enrolled each year. Disaggregating between institutional types, we can observe only little differences for the observed time period. Most notable is the increase in the share of students enrolled for online universities in very recent years (going up to 10%).

*Figure 4. Share of students enrolled by institutional type*



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