



Estonia

This report describes the structure of the national higher education system in Estonia, 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 Eurydice¹, the Estonian higher education (HE) system comprises two types of HEIs, namely universities and institutions of professional higher education. According to the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia, universities and research institutions are autonomous within the restrictions prescribed by law.

A **University** is a research, development, educational and cultural institution where instruction is provided at three levels of higher education according to professional higher education, Bachelor's study, Master's study and Doctoral study curricula in several fields of study. Main tasks include to advance science and culture and to provide science-based higher education and life-long learning.

An **Institution of Professional Higher Education** is an educational institution which provides professional higher education and which may provide Master's study and vocational training and where at least two thirds of the students study on the basis of higher education curricula. The task of Institutions of Professional Higher Education is preparation of motivated specialists with excellent professional skills and work attitudes at the first level of higher education, taking into account the needs of the labour market. Study is characterised by flexibility and practical focus of the curricula as well as close cooperation with enterprises, vocational unions and other social partners.

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 (*ülikool*) are mostly private government dependent institutions and have the right to award PhDs. In total, about 39% of all Estonian HEIs are Universities and equivalent institutions. Institutions of Professional Higher Education (*rakenduskõrgkool*) account for about 60% of all Estonian HEIs, however, none of them awards PhDs. 4 of the 11 Institutions of Professional Higher Education are private.

¹ https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/estonia/types-higher-education-institutions_en

Table 1. Institutional type and legal status by HEI type, 2020

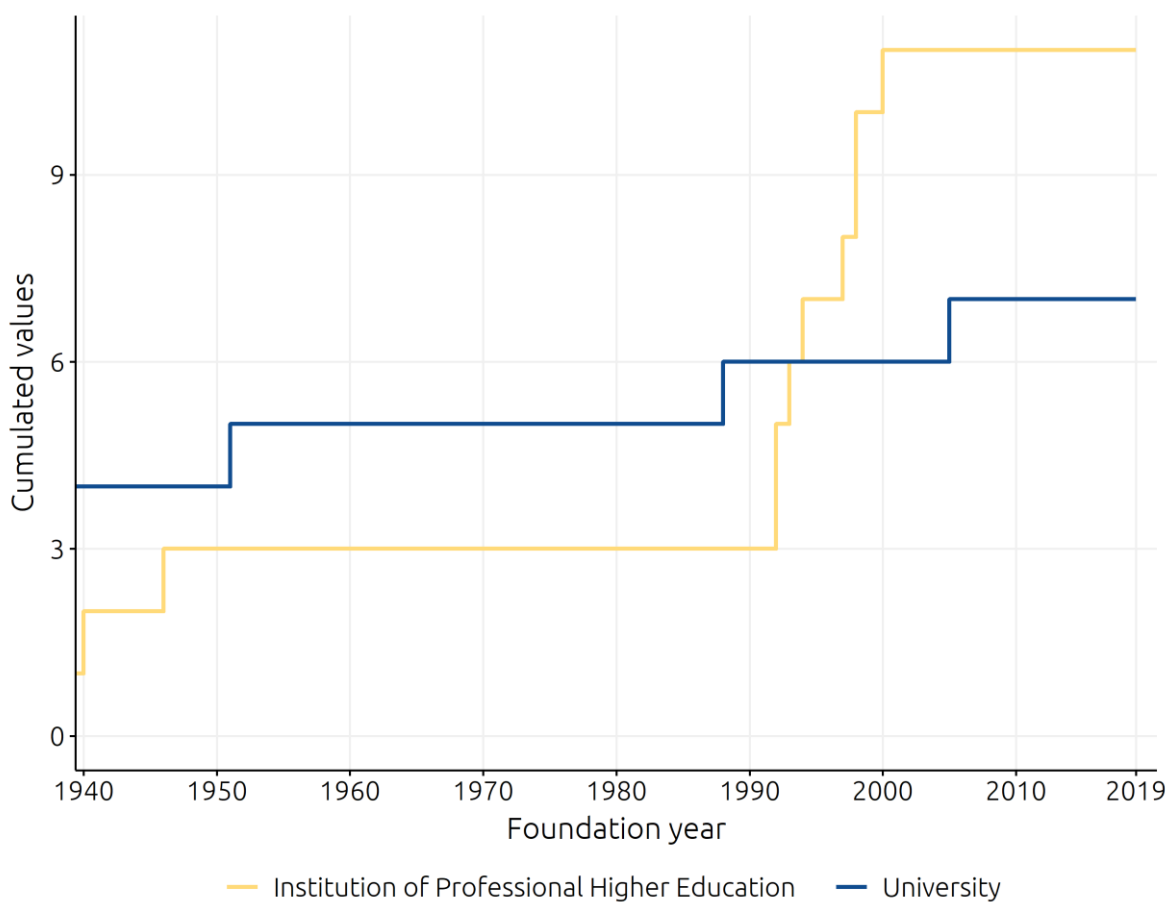
Category		N	Public	Private	Private government -dependent	PhD awarding
Institution of Professional Higher Education	rakenduskõrgkool	11	7	4	0	0
University	ülikool	7	0	1	6	7
Total		18	7	5	6	7

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 Estonia's higher education and its evolution over time. Figure 1 illustrates the expansion of the system in terms of the number of HEIs after 1940.

Figure 1. Foundation year of HEIs by type

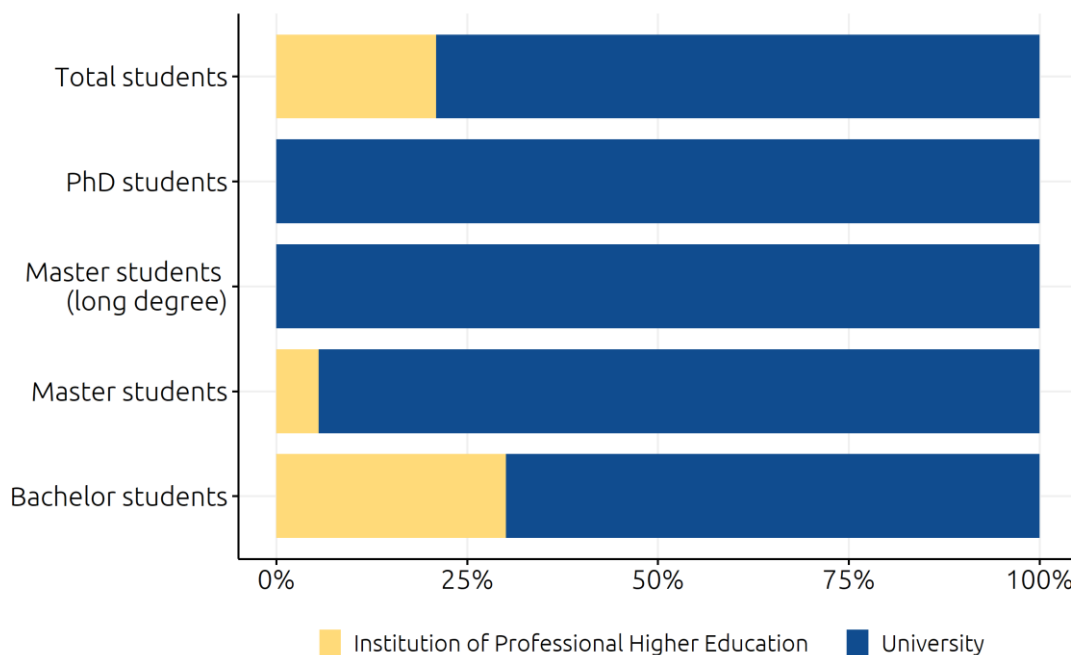


Interestingly, the Estonian HE system has ancient historical roots. The University of Tartu, the oldest Estonian University, dates back to 1632, and has been established under Swedish sovereignty, while under Russian sovereignty and later on Estonian independence, four further Universities have been established before 1940. While after the second World War only three more Universities have been opened, we can observe a sharp increase in the number of Institutions of Professional Higher Education between 1990 and 2000. After millennium, no further HEIs have appeared in the Estonian HE system.

How are students distributed?

Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of students across the two HEI categories of the Estonian HE system. It can be seen that Universities - while accounting just for around one third in terms of the number of institutions – enroll the majority of students (almost 80%), and all PhD students (since Institutions of Professional Higher Education are all non PhD awarding). Looking at Master students enrolment, universities account for almost 95%, while for Bachelor students around 70%. Master students long degree are exclusively subject to universities.

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



Note: Total students include ISCED 6-7

Financial resources

As illustrated by Figure 3, in the year 2019, Universities account for more than 90% of financial revenues of the whole HEI system, i.e. around 10% more than their share of students. This broadly corresponds to the fact that Universities also have an important research function. This difference is also reflected in the composition of revenues, where Universities receive a large proportion of revenues from the core budget but also from

(research-related) third-party funds. Overall, state allocation remains dominant for all institutional types in Estonia; student fees play a role, though only for Universities to a significant extent.

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

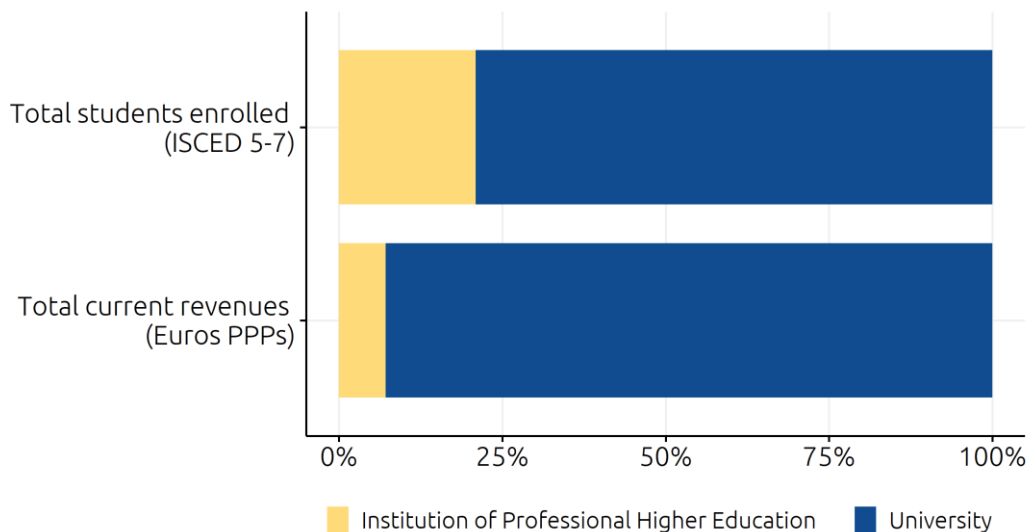
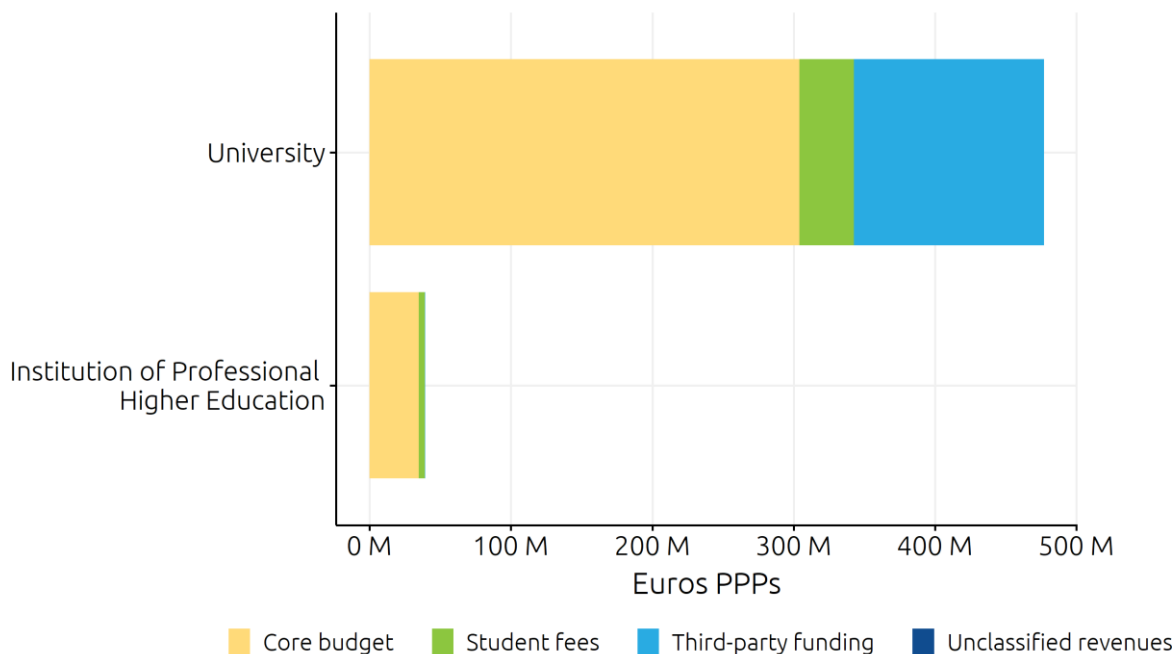


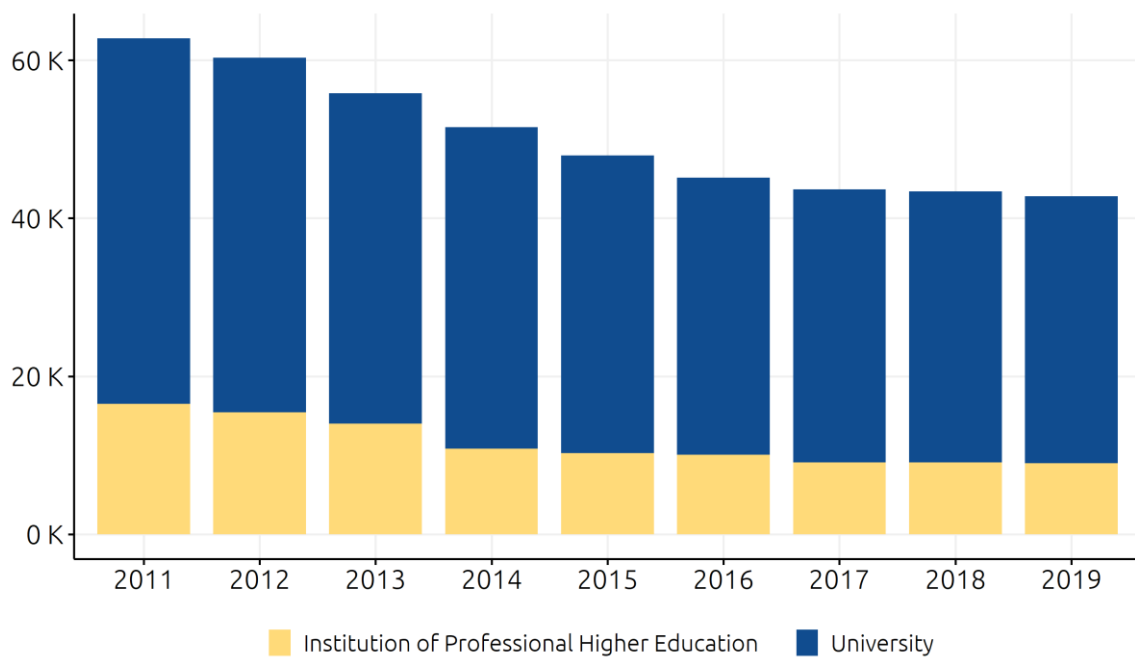
Figure 4. Composition of resources, Universities (ülikool) and Institutions of Professional Higher Education (rakenduskõrgkool)



Changing roles over time

When observed through the lens of the number of students, data show a decreasing pattern with the number of enrolled students decreasing by about one third from 2011 to 2019. The decrease is mainly related to the Estonian demographic situation. The share of the decrease is equally distributed across the two main categories of the Estonian HE system. After the year 2016, the reduction of students has slowed down, but the number of students is still decreasing slightly.

Figure 5. Share of students enrolled by institutional type





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