

Iceland

This report describes the structure of the national higher education system in Iceland, 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 2011-2020.

Types of Higher Education Institutions

According to Eurydice¹, the Icelandic higher education (HE) system comprises seven higher education institutions. Four are public institutions, three are private (of which two are non-profit organizations and one is a limited liability company). All institutions of higher education vary in the extent of research activity and the range of programmes offered. Among the seven institutions are two agricultural institutions, one academy of the arts and four institutions offering wide range of studies. The University of Iceland is the only university offering a complete range of disciplines and is also most active in research and development. The University of Iceland and Reykjavik University are the two higher education institutions accredited for PhD. training.

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. The Icelandic HE system comprises four Public universities (*Opinber háskóli*) and three private government-dependent ones (*Einkaháskóli*). Three of the four Public universities are PhD awarding institutions (University of Iceland and Agricultural University of Iceland), while only one of the three Private universities is PhD awarding (Reykjavik University).

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

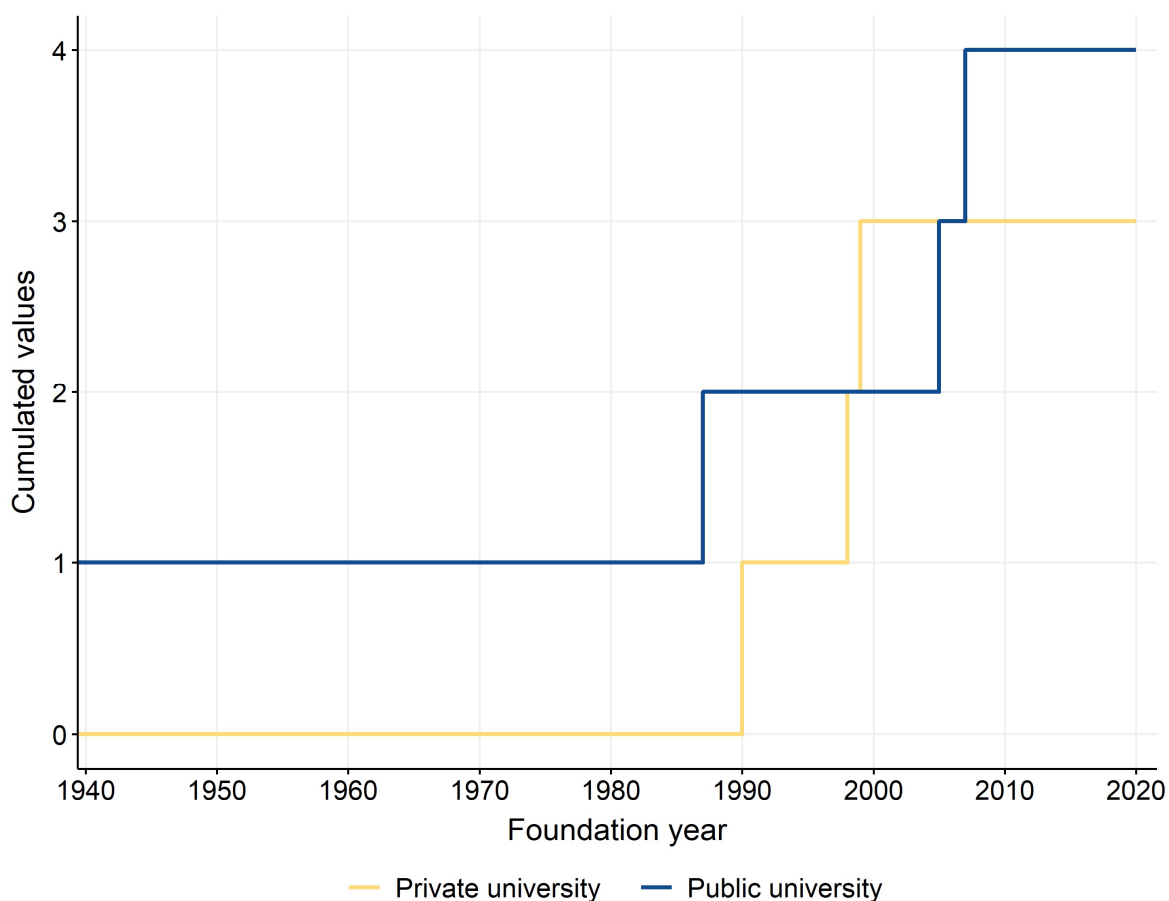
Category		N	Public	Private government-dependent	PhD awarding
Private university	Einkaháskóli	3	0	3	1
Public university	Opinber háskóli	4	4	0	3
Total		7	4	3	4

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

Institutional history. Older and younger institutional types

Data on the HEI foundation year provide information on the history of Iceland'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. The Icelandic HE system shows comparably recent roots; the oldest university (University of Iceland) has been established back in 1911 and was the only higher education institution until 1987. The remaining six institutions have all been founded in the past 35 years. The University of Akureyri was the second public university established in 1987, while Bifröst University was the first Private university founded in 1990. Of the four remaining institutions, two of them have been established before and after millennium, respectively (the last one was Hólar University College in 2007).

Figure 1. Foundation year of HEIs by type

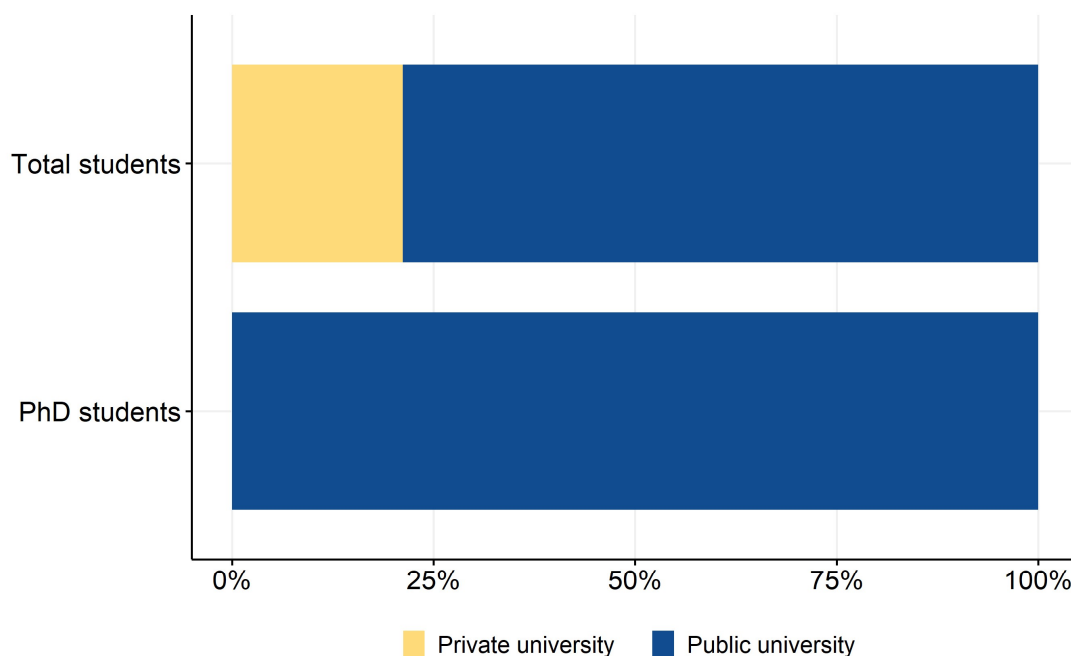


Students

Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of students across the two HEI categories of the Icelandic HE system. It can be seen that Public universities - while accounting just for 57% in terms of the number of institutions – enrol the majority of students (almost 80%), and 100% of PhD students (no data in 2020 for the only private PhD

awarding university, the *Reykjavik University*). The number of PhD students is comparably low (659 in absolute numbers).

Figure 2. Students by level and type of HEI, 2020



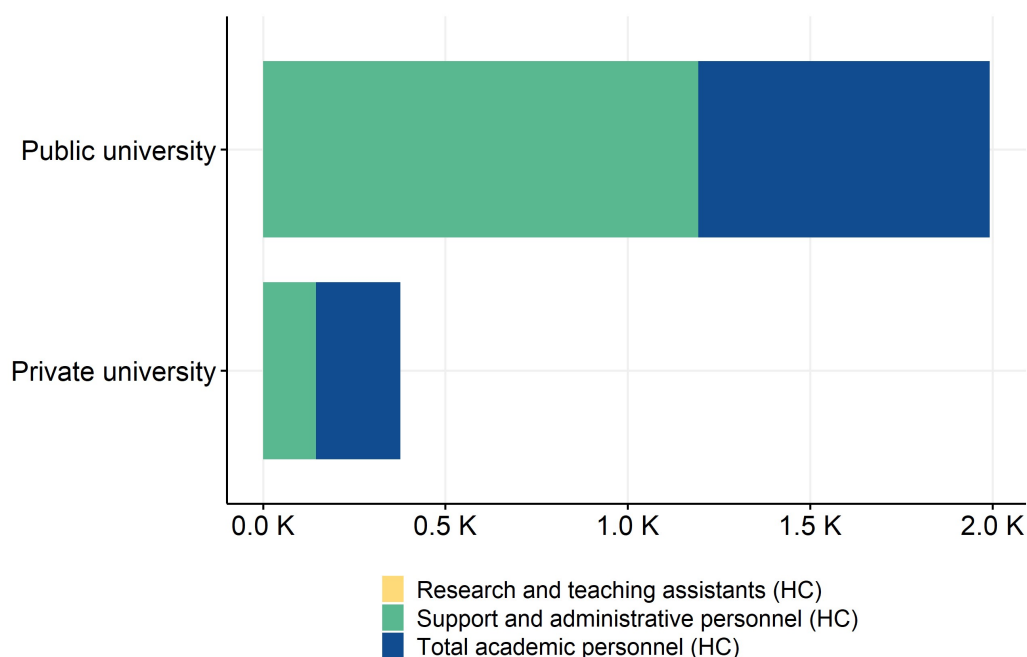
Note: Data on PhD students is missing for *Reykjavik University*

Personnel

People are a core resource for HEIs, as their competences are essential for teaching, undertaking research and producing scientific output. In that respect, ETER provides a rich set of data moving beyond the information available in EUROSTAT, which allows to analyse the composition of personnel by type of HEI and characteristics such as gender, nationality, educational field and, from 2020 onwards, levels of seniority (only partly available for Iceland).

As shown by Figure 3, there are remarkable differences between HEIs in size and in composition of staff categories in 2020. First, public universities are much larger in terms of staff size, with around 2,000 people working in public universities, while just about 350 in private universities. However looking at the composition by categories, the share of support and administrative personnel of private universities is inverse to the one of public universities. While almost two thirds are support and administrative staff in public universities it is only one third (31%) for private universities. The reason for the low share of academic personal in public universities is the composition of personal at the University of Iceland, by far the largest institution in Iceland with about 15,000 students. While this institution has reported only 624 tenured teachers, it employs another 3,729 part-time teachers not included in the figure below.

Figure 3. Personnel (HC) by category and type of HEI, 2020

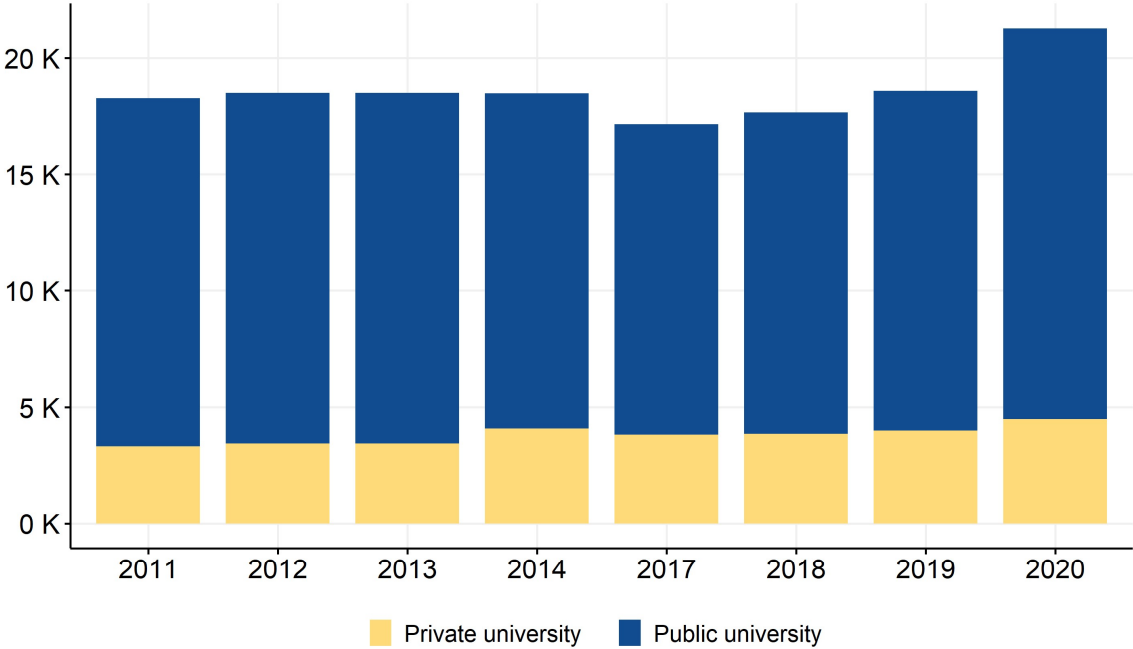


Note: Total academic personnel includes research and teaching assistants. No data for Agricultural University of Iceland and Bifröst University

Changing roles over time

When observed through the lens of the number of students, data show a very stable pattern with the number of enrolled students staying at around 18500 students from 2011 to 2019 (see Figure 6). A notable observations concerns a slight decline in total student numbers for Public universities in the years 2017 and 2018 (potentially related to a strong increase in job growth during this time period), though in 2019 the number is increasing back to the level of 2014. The share between Public and Private universities is slightly changing, with a minor but observable increase in the share of Private universities on the expense of public ones.

Figure 6. Share of students enrolled by type of HEI, 2011-2020



Note: No data for 2015 and 2016



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