eua EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY ASSOCIATION

University Autonomy in Europe IV

Country Profiles (II)

Flanders (Belgium) - Czechia - Estonia - Georgia - Italy - Latvia - Luxembourg - Netherlands - Romania - Serbia

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European University Association asbl

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Table of Contents

Introduction

The EUA Autonomy Scorecard offers a methodology to collect, compare and weight data on university autonomy. The Scorecard is based on more than 30 different core indicators in four key dimensions of autonomy. These include:

Organisational autonomy
covering academic and administrative structures, leadership and governance

Financial autonomy
covering the ability to raise funds, own buildings, borrow money and set tuition fees
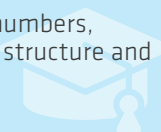
Staffing autonomy
including the ability to recruit independently, promote and develop academic and non-academic staff

Academic autonomy
including study fields, student numbers, student selection as well as the structure and content of degrees

The report University Autonomy in Europe IV: The Scorecard 2023 details the scope and methodology of the Autonomy Scorecard.

Since its previous edition in 2017, the Autonomy Scorecard's data and results have been presented not only through a comparative report, but also in the form of dedicated profiles. This report features a selection of profiles updated with the information collected for the 2023 Autonomy Scorecard.

The profiles focus on individual higher education systems. They are referred to as 'country profiles' by way of simplification, although they may focus on sub-national systems (as is the case for Belgium, Germany or the United Kingdom).

The country profiles contain information that allows, on the one hand, a comparison of the 35 higher education systems and, on the other hand, to provide more details on each of the systems. The main focus is nevertheless on providing a comparative view rather than a detailed in-depth country study.

EUA developed the profiles on the basis of the data collected from its collective members (national rectors' conferences and university associations) throughout the process of updating the Autonomy Scorecard. This included a) a survey; b) follow-up interviews; and c) interview reports.

The 2023 Autonomy Scorecard comprises 35 higher education systems, as listed in the following table.

Code	Country/system	2011	2017	2023
AT	Austria	●	●	●
BE-fl	Flanders (Belgium)	●	●	●
BE-fr	Wallonia-Brussels Federation (Belgium)		●	●
CH	Switzerland	●	●	●
CY	Cyprus	●		●
CZ	Czechia	●		●
DE-bb	Brandenburg (Germany)	●	●	●
DE-he	Hessen (Germany)	●	●	●
DE-nrw	North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany)	●	●	●
DK	Denmark	●	●	●
EE	Estonia	●	●	●
ES	Spain	●	●	●
FI	Finland	●	●	●
FR	France	●	●	●
GE	Georgia			●
GR	Greece	●		●
HR	Croatia		●	●
HU	Hungary	●	●	
IE	Ireland	●	●	●
IS	Iceland	●	●	●
IT	Italy	●	●	●
LT	Lithuania	●	●	●
LU	Luxembourg	●	●	●
LV	Latvia	●	●	●
NL	Netherlands	●	●	●
NO	Norway	●	●	●
PL	Poland	●	●	●
PT	Portugal	●	●	●
RO	Romania			●
RS	Serbia		●	●
SE	Sweden	●	●	●
SI	Slovenia		●	●
SK	Slovakia	●	●	●
TR	Türkiye	●		●
UK-en	England (UK)	●	●	●
UK-sc	Scotland (UK)			●

EUA will release the country profiles in batches from late 2023 to early 2024.

HOW TO READ THE PROFILES

Each profile includes several sections. These can be consulted separately, but together they depict the main characteristics of the system in question.

The first section describes the higher education landscape, providing information about the types of higher education institutions, student enrolment, and legal framework. It helps the reader understand how public universities, which are the core focus of the Autonomy Scorecard, feature in the broader higher education system.

The second section is a factsheet providing a snapshot overview of university autonomy in the considered system: score per dimension and over time, main changes recorded in the recent years.

The next four sections summarise the key features of the system per autonomy dimension: it dives into organisational autonomy (executive leadership, governance bodies, structures); financial autonomy (public funding allocation, financial management and tuition fees); staffing autonomy (recruitment, salaries, careers) and academic autonomy (student enrolment, academic programmes, external quality assurance).

The fifth section considers recent developments of relevance to university autonomy in the system, particularly when there have been changes posterior to the release of the 2023 report.

Finally, the sixth section outlines the views of the sector in relation to the university autonomy, sourced from EUA's collective members (national rectors' conferences and university associations).

# Autonomy of public universities in

Flanders

## BELGIUM

Higher education landscape

The Flemish higher education sector is comprised of public and private government-dependent university colleges (hogescholen), which enrol the largest share of students, as well as research universities (universiteiten). The latter group includes three public institutions (Ghent, Antwerp and Hasselt) and two 'free' universities (KU Leuven and Vrije Universiteit Brussel). Both types of universities enrol nearly equal numbers of students.

Free universities enjoy greater flexibility in governance and organisational matters. All five universities must adhere to the provisions of the decree on higher education (Codex Hoger Onderwijs), and each of them has a commissioner of the government sitting on the board to represent the public authorities to ensure compliance with the regulatory framework.

**Graph 1.** Higher education sector in Flanders (number of institutions)[1]

5

16

- ■ Universities
- ■ University Colleges
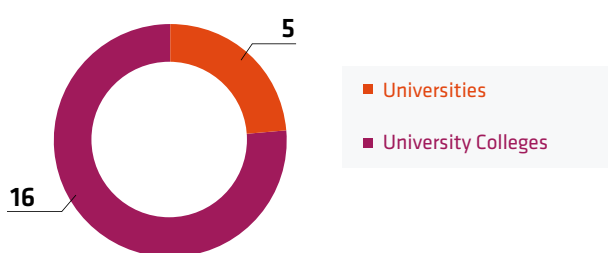
Graph 2. Distribution of student population in Flanders

40%

60%

- ■ Universities
- ■ University Colleges
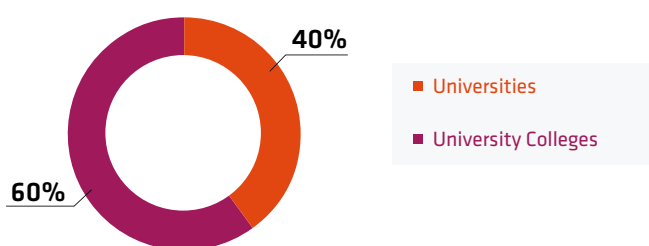
1   Data retrieved from the European Tertiary Education Register (ETER) corresponding to the 2020/2021 academic year.

Factsheet

70%
Organisational
autonomy

53%
Academic
autonomy

74%
Financial
autonomy

76%
Staffing
autonomy
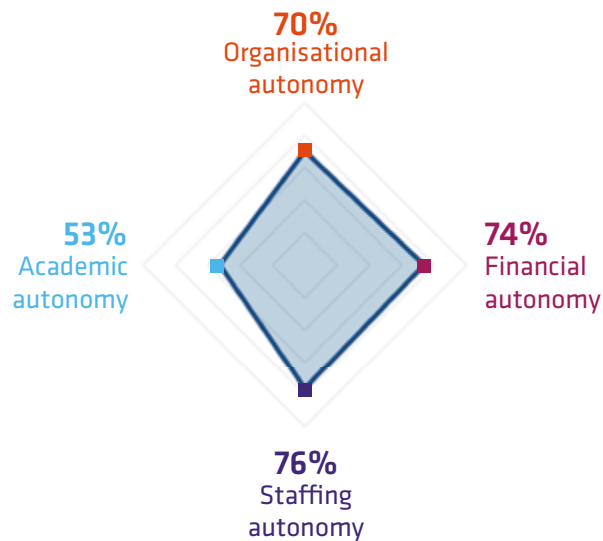
Autonomy dimension	2010	2017	2022	2022 Cluster	Rank
Organisational autonomy	70%	70% →	70% →	Medium high	15
Financial autonomy	74%	74% →	74% →	Medium high	7
Staffing autonomy	76%	76% →	76% →	Medium high	17
Academic autonomy	38%	35% ↘	53% ↗	Medium low	24

Timeline

2018   Lifting of the ban on the introduction of new programmes

Notwithstanding significant stability in scoring, it is important to note that the impact of certain developments, such as possible legal amendments, may fall outside the scope of the Scorecard. Therefore, stability in scoring must not necessarily be interpreted as an absence of system-level change. The following description pertains exclusively to the public higher education sector unless otherwise specified.

Organisational autonomy

Statutes

The university's statutes and changes to those are validated by the university board, making it a fully internal process.

Executive leadership

The selection of the executive head (rector) is an internal matter, thus not requiring external validation, while the selection criteria for the rector's position are stated in the law. Candidates must hold a doctoral degree, belong to the highest rank of professors, and come from within the university. The selection of the rector is a two-step process; the board endorses the candidates and gives a mandate to the selection committee, which consists of all members of academic staff, as well as students and external stakeholders. The decree (for public universities) or the university statutes (for 'free' universities) stipulate the procedure, including proportional representation.

The term of office for the rector differs across sub-systems. Public universities have a maximum term of four years fixed in law, with the possibility of renewal for up to two additional terms (one renewal only in the case of the University of Hasselt), while both free universities decide on the matter in their statutes (currently, they set the term of office at four years, with one renewal).

The dismissal of the rector is an internal matter for each institution as the corresponding procedure is not specified by law.

Governance bodies

Public universities have a unitary governance structure specified in the law, with the board/council-type body (university board) deciding on both strategic and academic issues. Some institutions may have additional advisory bodies. Both free universities have adopted a dual governance model, including an academic senate and a board.

University boards include academics, students, representatives of administrative staff and external members, with the latter forming around one-third of the total board membership and coming from the social partners of the university (employer associations, trade unions) and representatives of public authorities.

The government of Flanders proposes the external members of the board for public universities, who are formally appointed by the university. Both free universities can decide on the composition and size of their governing bodies, appointing external members directly and choosing them based on the strategic profile of the institution.

A government commissioner sits on the boards of all universities, irrespective of their status. These commissioners have no voting rights but perform an advisory role and ensure that university governance and management align with the regulatory framework and preserve the financial sustainability of the university.

Structures

Universities freely decide on their internal academic structures and the organisation of faculties and departments.

They can also create both for-profit and non-profit legal entities.

Financial autonomy

Public funding allocation

Universities in Flanders receive an annual block grant with no specific restrictions on internal allocation. The block grant primarily covers staff and operational costs and is adapted annually based on input and output parameters for education and research collected on a rolling basis (over a five-year period).

Financial management

Flemish universities can keep any surplus generated and build up financial reserves, but they must justify the purpose for their allocation. Universities in Flanders can borrow money without restrictions and do so to varying degrees.

Universities can own the facilities in which they operate and are allowed to sell their buildings, subject to some restrictions. Additionally, regulations regarding cultural heritage also apply to universities.

Tuition fees

Tuition fees are set externally for national and EU students. In 2021/2022, students who did not qualify for a grant were charged slightly under €1,000 per 60 ECTS for bachelor's and master's degree programmes, a fee similar to that applied to doctoral programmes. A ceiling applies to advanced master's degree programmes (slightly under €6,000), which enrol around 5% of the student population.

Flemish universities may set fees for non-EU students. In practice, they rarely charge higher fees for non-EU students than the set fees for national and EU students.

Staffing autonomy

Recruitment

Flemish universities are free to decide on recruitment procedures for both senior academic and administrative staff. However, international staff must take Dutch language proficiency tests to work at universities.

Salaries

Salaries for both academic and administrative staff are determined within the overall limit for all staff payments, collective bargaining, and regulations relative to the civil servant status. At public universities, senior academic and administrative staff hired from the block grant (as opposed to project-based funding), have civil servant status and their salaries follow civil servant salary scales. While senior staff at free universities do not have civil servant status, their remuneration levels are similar to those of their counterparts at public universities.

Careers

Staff promotions are determined internally, although the abovementioned financial restrictions may play a role. The dismissal of staff is subject to regulations specific to the higher education sector or the civil service, particularly in the case of senior staff hired from the block grant at public universities.

Academic autonomy

Student enrolment

The selection of students at the bachelor's degree level in Flanders is entirely regulated externally and based on free admission.

To help prospective students make more informed decisions, pre-enrolment positioning tests may be mandatory or optional, depending on the discipline. Although consultative in nature, these tests guide students in their disciplinary choices, and test failure cannot result in refusal of admission. Regulated professions such as medicine and dentistry have limited places and require an entrance exam. From 2023-2024 the same requirement will apply to veterinary medicine.

At master's degree level, admission is co-regulated by public authorities and universities.

Degree programmes

Universities are recognised for a certain range of academic disciplines and may only open programmes that pertain to their study fields. In addition, at bachelor's and master's degree levels, all new programmes must be submitted for prior accreditation before being introduced. The ban on the introduction of new degree programmes, in effect from 2015 to 2017, has been lifted. Moreover, new programmes are subject to an additional accreditation process (maximum three years after introduction).

Universities can terminate programmes independently.

Universities are constrained in the context of the language of instruction. Any programme offered in a language other than Dutch must first be available in Dutch in at least one Flemish university. Currently, universities can offer a maximum of 35% of their master's degree programmes and 9% at the bachelor's degree level in other languages (up from 6%).

Universities can design the content of their degree programmes without constraints.

External quality assurance

Since 2016, institutional reviews of universities' educational policy and quality processes have been introduced as the main element of the future quality assurance system. Both the accreditation process and institutional reviews are organised by NVAO, the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders. While other foreign agencies may be involved, universities must receive formal accreditation by NVAO. Universities cannot choose their accreditation body but can choose another body for evaluations.
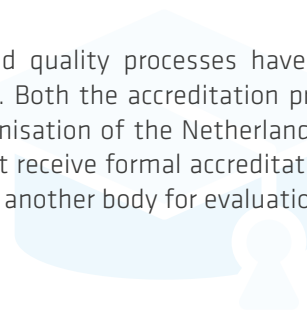
Recent developments

Obstacles to internationalisation

The recruitment of international staff and the provisions regarding the language of instruction are some of the current challenges faced by Flemish universities. Furthermore, it is expected that the process of hiring third-country nationals will become even more complex and time-consuming with the forthcoming integration of the 'guest agreement' (the equivalent of a scientific visa) into the single permit system, which will be handled partly at federal level and partly by the regions.

Financial sustainability

Four different funding challenges, with a negative impact on institutional autonomy, were identified by the sector. These include the erosion of the primary funding stream, insufficient investment in infrastructure for education and research - due to the lack of understanding and mismatch between needs and supply, limited coverage of indirect costs in competitive funding (capped at 10%), and the delay or omission of 'clicks', a provision whereby public funding for universities can be adapted in response to changes in student enrolment (by a margin of 2%). In this context, the increased use of earmarked or targeted funding cannot compensate for the pressures on the long-term financial sustainability of Flemish universities.

Views from the sector

The Flemish university sector considers that the aging infrastructure of universities poses a challenge for adapting to sustainability, safety, and regulatory standards, particularly in the context of heritage regulations.

The sector posits that restrictions related to the language of instruction can lead to excessive duplication of the educational offer, as evidenced by a tendency among students to choose English-language versions of study programmes over their Dutch-language equivalents. This raises concerns about the sustainability and redundancy of offering both language options. Besides, the sector fears that this could have a negative impact on the international appeal of Flemish universities.

In the context of external quality assurance, the Dutch and Flemish higher education systems are progressively diverging, leading Flemish universities to question the suitability of NVAO overseeing both systems.

The sector has raised concerns about dispersed, short-term and excessive government interventionism, often driven by political pressure. Universities consider that these fragmented measures lack a rational build-up and fail to reflect institutional practices, revealing a limited understanding of the higher education system. The sector feels that this had led to a growing gap between the government and academia.

Autonomy of public universities in
# Czechia

Higher education landscape

The Czech higher education system comprises public, state and private universities. There are 26 public universities overseen by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (hereafter, the ministry), and two state universities[1] (the University of Defence and the Police Academy) under the supervision of relevant ministries. In addition, there are 33 private higher education institutions (HEIs) in Czechia.[2] All types of institutions are regulated by the Higher Education Act.

Private institutions generally have more flexibility in their internal organisation, as they are not required to have academic senates and may have a chief executive officer (CEO) instead of a rector. They receive very limited public funding and typically rely on tuition fees, R&D activities and other projects for income. Even though private universities outnumber public universities, they accommodate for a fraction of the student population (around 9% in 2020).

**Graph 1.** Higher education sector in Czechia

26
33
- Public HEIs
- Private HEIs
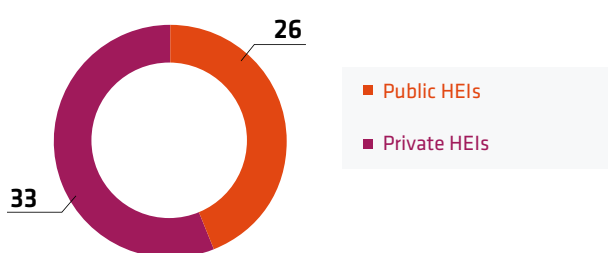
Graph 2. Distribution of student population in Czechia
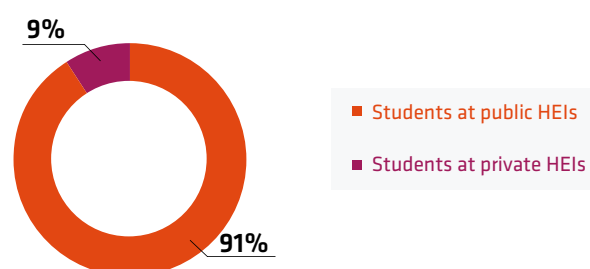
9%
91%
- Students at public HEIs
- Students at private HEIs

The following description pertains exclusively to the public higher education sector unless otherwise specified.

1 Although the Czech higher education sector includes two state universities, the data regarding the student distribution for 2021/2022 academic year was unavailable at the time of writing, therefore they are not included in the graphs. In 2020, both institutions combined enrolled slightly under 4,000 students.
2 All data relate to the 2021/2022 academic year and were provided by the Czech Rectors' Conference.

Factsheet

54%
Organisational autonomy

72%
Academic autonomy

69%
Financial autonomy

98%
Staffing autonomy
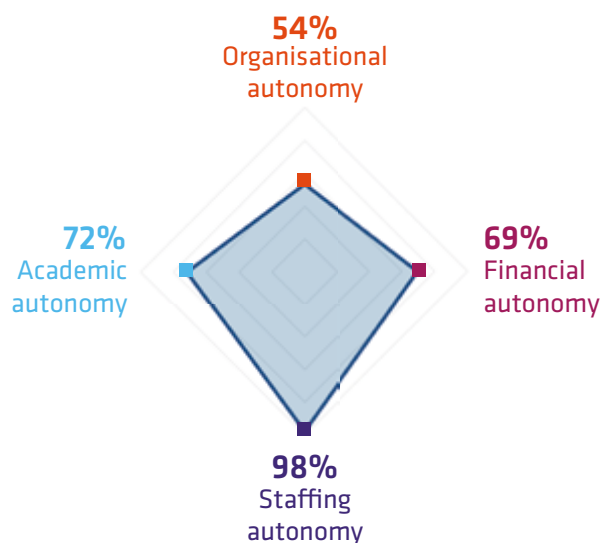
Autonomy dimension[3]	2010	2022		2022 Cluster	Rank
Organisational autonomy	54%	54%	→	Medium low	30
Financial autonomy	67%	69%	↗	Medium high	12
Staffing autonomy	98%	98%	→	High	2
Academic autonomy	52%	72%	↗	Medium high	13

Timeline

2016 Amendment of the Higher Education Act, resulting in several significant changes for universities, including the introduction of institutional accreditation and the creation of new bodies responsible for institutional and programme accreditation at system and institutional levels.

3 Czechia did not participate in the second edition of the Autonomy Scorecard (2017). The reference period for comparison is therefore 2010 to 2022.

Organisational autonomy

Statutes

Changes to university statutes must be approved internally by the senate and formally registered by the ministry. Registration can be refused only on grounds on non-compliance with the Higher Education Act or other legislation.

Executive leadership

The selection and dismissal of the executive head (rector) are carried out by the senate and officially approved by the president of Czechia. The proposal for approval is submitted through the ministry. While the university senate is responsible for selecting the rector, the nomination process for candidates varies across universities and is outlined in the statutes reflecting institutional traditions.

There are no legal provisions regarding selection criteria for the position, which allows universities to nominate candidates proceeding from other institutions. However, in practice, rectors are typically selected from senior academic staff within the university.

The law stipulates the length of the term of office, which is four years, and the rector may serve two consecutive terms.

Governance bodies

Czech universities have a dual governance model, with the senate and the board of trustees being the most important bodies. The senate acts as the representative body for academic self-governance, and is responsible for approving internal regulations, budget, the medium-term outlook, and strategic development plans. Following the senate's approval, the board of trustees approves the institution's strategic plan, budget, and the medium-term outlook, while also managing its assets. If the board of trustees rejects a proposal, the senate may approve it if three fifths of all members are in favour.

The senate comprises elected academic members and students, with a requirement that students make up between one third and half of the members.

The board of trustees is exclusively composed of external members, with a minimum of nine members. The maximum number is not specified but must be divisible by three. The university suggests members, which are then approved by the ministry. Members are expected to represent diverse areas of public life, including civil servants, graduates, and business representatives, provided they are not employed by the university. Their term of office is six years, with one third of the positions made available again every two years.

In addition to the main decision-making bodies, universities have a scientific board, which oversees habilitation procedures, discusses all major reporting documents before submission for approval by the senate, and has competences in the area of quality assurance. It may delegate some of these competences to the internal evaluation board, such as the approval of degree programmes and of the plan for submission of the accreditation request to the national accreditation authority. Both boards are fully appointed by the university according to rules set out in the Higher Education Act.

Structures

Universities must adhere to legal guidelines to establish academic structures.

They are fully autonomous to create legal entities.

Financial autonomy

Public funding allocation

Basic institutional funding is provided through yearly block grants, which consist of three major parts: a) a grant for teaching, research and other activities, b) institutional support for research, development and innovation, and c) institutional development. Rules apply regarding the use of each of these funds and universities may not shift funds across these categories.

Financial management

Universities may keep surplus fully or in part, depending on the funding stream. There is no constraint on the re-allocation of surplus generated from the block grant for teaching, research and other activities, but surplus from other types of grants may be subject to certain limitations. Previously, universities could only keep a surplus up to a maximum percentage and required external approval to do so.

Universities may borrow money from the financial market and do not require the authorisation of the ministry.

Czech universities may own and sell their buildings without the approval of public authorities; the law specifies that the prior written consent of the board of trustees is required.

Tuition fees

Within the Czech higher education system, tuition fees depend on the language of instruction. There are no fees for degree programmes taught in Czech, regardless of the student's citizenship. However, if a student fails to complete studies within the standard length of a given degree programme (plus one year), universities are obliged to charge fees, where the minimum amount is stipulated by law.

In the case of degree programmes delivered in a foreign language, most typically in English, universities must charge tuition fees, the amount of which they may set autonomously.

Staffing autonomy

Recruitment

Czech universities recruit their senior academic and administrative staff autonomously. University staff do not hold civil servant status.

Traditionally, the highest academic titles of professor or associate professor ('docent') can be obtained after a successful habilitation/appointment procedure. Associate professors are appointed by the rector after the approval of the scientific board of the university. The title of 'professor' is awarded by the Czech president, on the proposal of the minister of education (and the approval of the university's scientific board).

Czech universities are free to hire professors and/or associate professors and offer employment contracts according to their internal regulations.

Salaries

University may set salaries, which are not subject to sector-specific regulations.

Careers

Universities have the autonomy to establish their own promotion and dismissal procedures.

Academic autonomy

Student enrolment

Although Czech universities may in principle decide on student enrolment, in practice there are various constraints according to which overall student numbers are determined. Reducing study places by more than 10% compared to the previous year may lead to a reduction in funding for the following year. There are no limits on student numbers in degree programmes carried out in foreign languages, as they are supported by the tuition fees charged to the students.

Admission to bachelor's and master's degree programmes is considered a fully internal matter, allowing universities to have their own admission policies in place (this is also the case at doctoral level).

Degree programmes

Since the 2016 reform, universities that have been granted institutional accreditation may autonomously introduce new programmes within the accredited field. Otherwise, all degree programmes at bachelor's, master's and doctoral degree levels must receive prior accreditation by the National Accreditation Bureau for Higher Education. The university's internal evaluation board prepares the application for institutional accreditation, which the scientific board evaluates. In the case of accreditation of a degree programme (outside of institutional accreditation) the internal evaluation board evaluates the proposal before its submission to the national authority. Universities have the flexibility to terminate programmes, but they must ensure the transfer of enrolled students.

Czech universities are free to choose the language of instruction at the bachelor's and master's degree levels. For programmes delivered in foreign languages, universities must charge tuition fees.

Universities are autonomous to decide on the content of their degree programmes.

External quality assurance

The quality assurance reform in Czechia brought about significant changes, including voluntary institutional accreditation and mandatory programme accreditation if the university has not secured institutional accreditation. The responsibility for all types of accreditation processes in Czechia was assigned to the National Accreditation Bureau (NAU), a new agency funded by the ministry. Nonetheless, universities may hire other EQAR-registered agencies for external evaluation, the results of which the NAU may use.
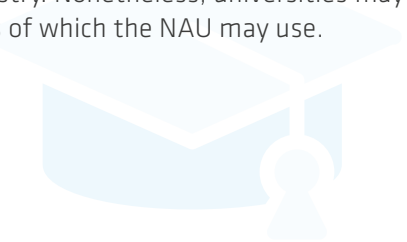
Recent developments

The law on higher education was amended in 2016, which resulted in several significant changes.

Universities that have obtained institutional accreditation may now hire 'visiting professors', who, while not having been granted the title of professor or associate professor, possess extensive expertise in a specific field of study.

The law differentiates between academically oriented and profession-oriented programmes, with the latter requiring mandatory internships. The validation of prior qualification within the admission procedure has been simplified and decentralised for universities with institutional accreditation. These can therefore recognise (for study purposes) prior non-tertiary, tertiary and higher education gained abroad directly, rather than through local/national government.

Another significant development concerning the Czech higher education system since the last edition of the Autonomy Scorecard is the rollout of the so-called 'M17+' methodology[4] used for research evaluation as of 2017. It covers the research landscape across Czechia and assesses the outputs, impact, and institutional setting of a research organisation. These organisations are classified into three segments for evaluation: a) universities; b) institutes of the Czech Academy of Sciences; and c) departmental research organisations. The outcomes of universities' evaluations are considered by the ministry for funding decisions.

4   Methodology for Evaluating Research Organisations and Research, Development and Innovation Purpose-tied Aid Programmes – see: https://www.vyzkum.cz/FrontClanek.aspx?idsekce=695512

Views from the sector

The changes made to the quality assurance system, emphasizing a stronger focus on quality, have been well-received by the sector. Notably, the introduction of the internal evaluation board is seen as an important development for Czech universities.

The sector expected further amendments to the law on higher education, particularly regarding the doctoral level.

In March 2023, the Czech Rectors' Conference raised concerns over the financial challenges facing higher education institutions in the country.[5] At the time of writing, with inflation rates on the rise and energy costs soaring, universities were struggling to remain competitive due to significant underfunding, particularly when compared to other European systems. It was highlighted that public funding to universities had significantly decreased since 2010. The sector advocates for increased investment in higher education to offset pressures linked to the current demographic trends and economic context.

5   https://www.crc.muni.cz/dokumenty/usneseni/prohlaseni-ckr-k-financovani-vysokeho-skolstvi

Autonomy of public universities in
Estonia

Higher education landscape

The Estonian higher education sector comprises universities (Ülikool) and professional higher education institutions (Rakenduskõrgkool). The universities carry out research and offer degree programmes at all three cycles, whereas the professional higher education institutions offer vocational training and carry out studies at bachelor's and master's degree levels only. Both types of institutions may hold either public or private legal status. The Higher Education Act, which provides the regulatory framework for both state-owned and private higher education institutions since 2019, focuses mainly on organisational and operational matters.

It replaces the Universities Act, passed in 1995 and amended in 2014. The University of Tartu was regulated differently from the outset, while Tallinn University of Technology was emancipated from the Act in 2014. Following the 2019 regulatory framework reform, this approach was generalised, and individual acts were introduced for each public university, in addition to the Higher Education Act.

While the professional higher education institutions represent the largest number of providers in the system, universities accommodate nearly 80% of the student population. There is only one private university (Estonian Business School), which enrols roughly 3% of students.

State-owned professional higher education institutions fall under the purview of the Ministry of Education and Research. As state institutions, they have significantly less financial autonomy. The rector of such an institution is appointed through a public competition and signs an employment contract with the ministry.

Private institutions enjoy a relatively higher degree of freedom, although they must follow the sector-wide provisions on academic matters. The main differences relate to organisational affairs, notably relating to the rector's selection process and governance structures.

**Graph 1. Higher education sector in Estonia[1]**

39%

61%

- Universities
- Professional higher education institutions
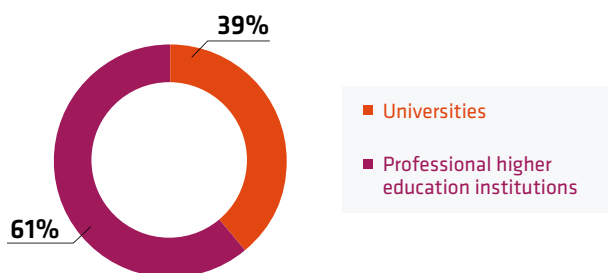
Graph 2. Distribution of student population in Estonia
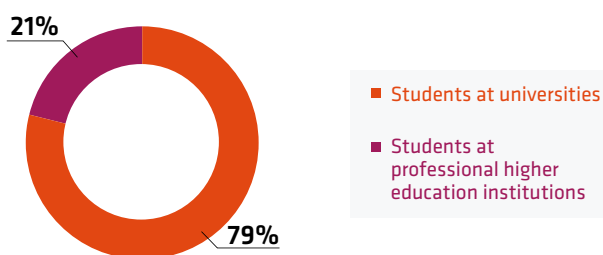
21%

79%

- Students at universities
- Students at professional higher education institutions

The following description pertains exclusively to the public higher education sector unless otherwise specified.

1   2020 data extracted from the European Tertiary Education Register (ETER) database.

Factsheet

73%
Organisational
autonomy

95%
Academic
autonomy

77%
Financial
autonomy

100%
Staffing
autonomy
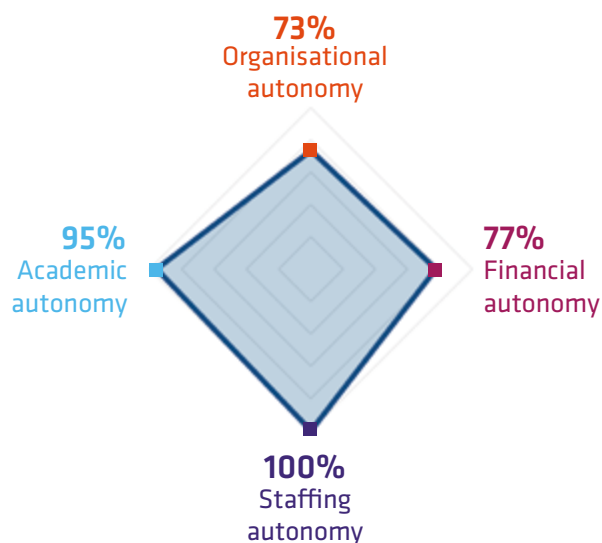
Autonomy dimension	2010	2017		2022		2022 Cluster	Rank
Organisational autonomy[2]	85%	85%	→	73%	↘	Medium high	13
Financial autonomy	94%	77%	↘	77%	→	Medium high	4
Staffing autonomy	100%	100%	→	100%	→	High	1
Academic autonomy	92%	98%	↗	95%	↘	High	1

Notwithstanding significant stability in scoring, it is important to mention that the impact of certain developments, including possible legal amendments, cannot be captured by the Scorecard, as they may fall beyond its scope. Therefore, stability with respect to scoring may not necessarily be interpreted as absence of system-level change.

Timeline

2019 The Higher Education Act replaces the 1995 Universities Act; individual university acts are passed for each public university.

2   Correction: the answer regarding the procedure of the dismissal of the executive head was changed from "is not stated in the law" to "is stated in the law", which resulted in a score change from 87% to 85%.

Organisational autonomy

Statutes

Universities can make changes to their statutes. The university senate makes a preliminary decision, which is then confirmed or rejected by the university council. The senate holds final decision-making capacity on the matter.

Executive leadership

The selection of the executive head remains an internal matter. Most Estonian universities, with the exception of the Tallinn University of Technology, set up a bespoke election body that consists of the senate and council members, as well as members of other academic structures. At Tallinn University of Technology, the rector is selected by the council, which can overturn a senate veto if necessary.

The law requires that the candidate hold an academic position. While previously the law prescribed the exact term of office, it now specifies that the rector may serve up to five years. Most individual acts stipulate that the same person may serve for up to two terms.

The rector's dismissal is initiated by the senate and the council after a joint vote of no confidence. At Tallinn University of Technology, the council alone is responsible for initiating the process of no confidence. There is no external authority involved in the procedure.

Governance bodies

Owing to the 2019 governance reform, the governance structure of Estonian universities has changed from a senate-based unitary model to a dual traditional one, with decision-making capacity now being distributed between the council and the senate. The governance reform was driven by a combination of bottom-up and top-down initiatives. While the University of Tartu and Tallinn University of Technology made the decision to restructure their governing bodies earlier on, prioritising an external perspective on strategic dimensions and financial planning, the transformation of the governance model of the other universities was encouraged by the public authorities through the regulatory framework renewal.

The recently created councils mainly oversee strategic, organisational and financial matters, whereas senates remain in charge of academic affairs. The individual laws further detail respective competencies.

The composition of the senate has remained the same and its membership is fully internal to the university, with basic requirements laid out in the individual acts, including threshold requirements for student representation (at least one fifth of members). The rector chairs the senate. Only at the University of Tartu does the law stipulate the maximum size of the senate.

There can be seven to 11 council members, half of whom are appointed by the university senate and half by the Ministry of Education and Research. The remaining member (external) is appointed by the Estonian Academy of Science, although public authorities hold the right of final approval. External members therefore form a majority in the council and are nominated by public authorities (and the Estonian Academy of Science). The university only has the prerogative to decide on internal representatives. Council members are nominated for five years.

Structures

Estonian universities decide freely on internal academic structures and are allowed to create non-for-profit and for-profit legal entities.
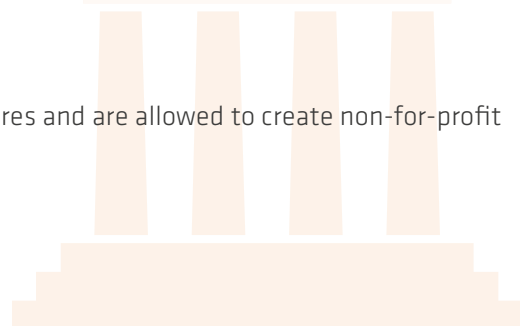
Financial autonomy

Public funding allocation

Public funding is allocated on an annual basis through separate formulas for teaching and research, without notable restrictions on internal distribution. The Higher Education Act stipulates that the ministry concludes with each university an administrative contract for three to five years, setting out the university's obligations based on its mission, goals, objectives and the needs of the state, as well as the allocation of support for the performance of these obligations. These 'performance agreements' do not concern the university's research activities.

Financial management

Estonian universities remain free to borrow money without restrictions, keep surplus, own and sell buildings.

Tuition fees

Since 2013, there are no tuition fees for students enrolled full-time in degree programmes delivered in Estonian. However, Estonian universities may charge fees to students who do not complete 30 ECTS credits per semester, in order to partially compensate for study costs. Universities may decide not to charge fees within the allowed credit margins.

Universities are free to set fees for degree programmes taught in other languages.

Staffing autonomy

Recruitment

Estonian universities remain highly autonomous in staffing matters. They organise the recruitment of senior academic and administrative staff autonomously. The Quality Agreement, which Estonian universities voluntarily developed to produce common principles for the recruitment of academic staff, no longer states the minimum criteria for staff recruitment processes. The principles agreed at the time in the Agreement are an integral part of institutional practices and culture.

Salaries

Decisions on salaries, for academic as well as administrative staff, remain an internal matter for universities.

Careers

Universities are free to promote and dismiss senior academic and administrative staff.

Most employment contracts have shifted towards permanent contracts for staff instead of fixed-term ones, as was the case previously. Universities periodically evaluate the performance of academic staff, at least once every five years. If an academic staff member does not meet the evaluation criteria, the employment contract may be terminated in accordance with the procedures outlined in the Employment Contracts Act. This gives universities more leeway than other employers regarding dismissals. However, universities, as employers, may apply a different procedure in the case of tenured academic staff members.

Academic autonomy

Student enrolment

Estonian universities freely decide on student numbers and develop their own admissions criteria for students, both for bachelor's and master's degree programmes.

Performance contracts may set specific targets regarding student enrolment in specific fields. Most Estonian universities had to reduce the number of study places for bachelor's degree programmes in the field of business administration, while increasing enrolment in information and communications technology (ICT), health and teacher education. However, this measure did not effectively curb demand as anticipated. In fact, admissions to those programmes have increased at vocational institutions.

Degree programmes

Universities hold the right to organise studies in different academic fields based on an evaluation by the Quality Assurance Agency. Within these fields, universities may introduce new programmes without external approval. However, they must officially register the programmes at the ministry, which formally checks compliance with the legislation (i.e. the International Standard Classification of Education).

Universities are free to design the content of their study programmes.

The Higher Education Act stipulates that the language of instruction of the study programmes of the first and second level of higher education is Estonian. Alternatively, by decision of the higher education institution, a foreign language may be used as the language of instruction, provided that it is necessary for ensuring the quality of the studies or the availability of required specialists. Universities may therefore decide on the language of instruction, with the caveat that they have the adequate resources and must offer equivalent programmes in Estonian at bachelor's and master's degree levels. This latter condition is not set in law but has been incorporated in performance agreements with the aim to protect Estonian-language programmes in all fields of education.

External quality assurance

Estonian universities undergo institutional accreditation every seven years. Universities can select quality assurance agencies from other countries as long as they have received approval from the Estonian Higher Education Quality Agency.

Recent developments

The introduction of permanent contracts (instead of fixed-term contracts), along with the changes in staff performance evaluation, has been viewed as a mutually beneficial development: staff members have increased employment stability while universities can terminate contracts based on poor performance.

A political discussion has emerged around the suitability to allocate public funds to bachelor's and master's degree programmes that are delivered in a foreign language (mainly in English).

As of 2022, the majority of doctoral candidates have a fixed-term employment contract as junior researchers, also maintaining their legal status as students, mainly for various international mobility schemes. It is still possible to commence doctoral studies as a student only. However, state support for the candidate in terms of salary is attached to the work contract.

Views from the sector

The sector expresses concern about growing micro-management tendencies among public authorities. Current regulations do not explicitly define the scope of performance agreements, which allows the government to exert control over extensive areas. This situation disproportionately burdens smaller universities, while larger universities face even higher expectations.

The sector thus worries about the instrumentalisation of performance agreements, which in effect steer universities into certain directions. It is perceived as a way for the government to interfere in the governance of universities, undermining institutional autonomy.

Furthermore, the absence of a clear higher education strategy has made it possible for the government to incorporate its political agenda into these performance agreements, for instance by seeking to set quotas for international students. This makes the development of performance contracts vulnerable to political considerations and generates uncertainty for universities, particularly when these agreements are signed in the context of an election.

Another pressing concern is the government's allocation of additional tasks to universities without providing the corresponding funds necessary for their implementation.

The sector also faces the challenge of a high share of project funding in research coupled with a broader shift from funding basic research to supporting applied research and innovation. Combined, these trends hinder strategic research development at universities, despite rather high financial autonomy.
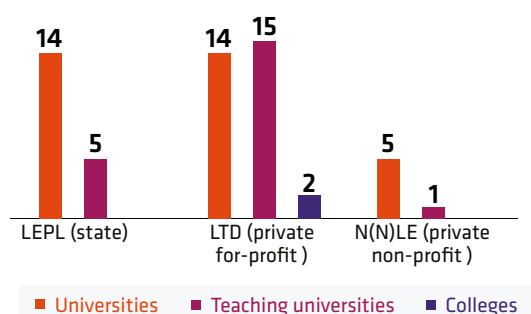
Autonomy of public universities in Georgia

Higher education landscape

The development of the Georgian higher education system in the past 15 years has been largely influenced by the Bologna Process, which the country joined in 2005. Institutions are classified into three categories: state, private for-profit, and private non-profit. State universities operate as legal entities of public law (LEPL), while private for-profit institutions are considered limited liability entities (LTD), and private non-profit institutions operate as non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entities (N(N)LE). Additionally, the state may establish institutions with either LEPL or N(N)LE legal status. Seven orthodox theological higher education institutions (seminaries) provide education in orthodox theology and operate outside of the regulatory framework.

The higher education sector distinguishes between universities, teaching universities, and colleges. Universities have the right to offer academic programmes at all three cycles and conduct scientific research. Teaching universities may offer all academic programmes except for doctoral programmes, while colleges are only authorised to offer bachelor's degree programmes.

Private providers make up the majority of the higher education institutions, but public HEIs enrol approximately 60% of students.

**Graph 1. Higher education sector in Georgia[1]**

LEPL (state): Universities 14, Teaching universities 5

LTD (private for-profit): Universities 14, Teaching universities 15, Colleges 2

N(N)LE (private non-profit): Universities 5, Teaching universities 1

■ Universities   ■ Teaching universities   ■ Colleges

Graph 2. Distribution of student population in Georgia

60%
40%

■ Students at public HEIs

■ Students at private HEIs (LTD + N(N)LE)
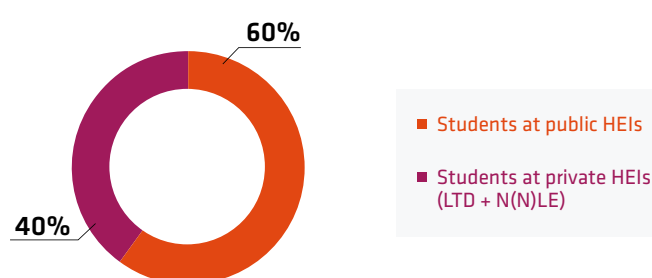
The main legal documents governing higher education in Georgia are the Law on Higher Education and the Law on Educational Quality Enhancement, which apply to all institutions. There is a mandatory institutional authorisation to obtain the status of a higher education institution and operate in Georgia. Private institutions typically enjoy greater autonomy in organisational and financial matters, such as setting fees, and are exempt from profit taxation. However, all institutions are subject to the same regulations regarding quality assurance, regardless of their status.

1   The data corresponds to 2022/ 2023 academic year and it is taken from National Centre of Educational Quality Enhancement and the Georgian statistics office.

Factsheet

66%
Organisational
autonomy

71%
Financial
autonomy

48%
Academic
autonomy

96%
Staffing
autonomy
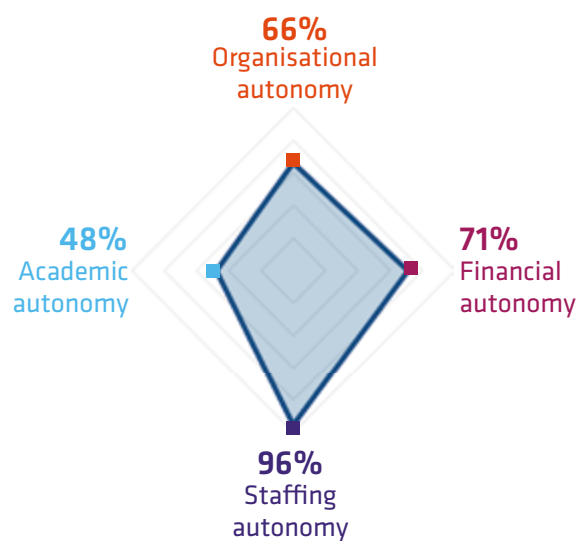
Autonomy dimension	2022	2022 Cluster	Rank
Organisational autonomy	66%	Medium high	18
Financial autonomy	71%	Medium high	9
Staffing autonomy	96%	High	4
Academic autonomy	48%	Medium low	27

The following description pertains exclusively to the public higher education sector unless otherwise specified.

Organisational autonomy

Statutes

Formal ex-ante approval from the ministry is necessary before modifying university statutes.

Executive leadership

The law stipulates that the rector is the head of a higher education institution established by the state, and two criteria are required: the rector must have a doctoral degree or equivalent and must not be older than 65. Other criteria may be elaborated on in the university statutes. Holding an academic position is not mandatory and candidates from other national and foreign institutions may apply.

In all state universities, the academic council (senate-type body) elects and dismisses the rector by secret ballot. The rector also serves as the chairperson of the academic council, and is elected for four years, with the term renewable once. Dismissal is possible if the rector is found to have broken the law or failed to fulfil their duties, and/or on the grounds of gross misconduct.

Governance bodies

The governance structure can be categorised as dual asymmetric. The board of representatives[2] (hereafter referred to as the board) is responsible for adopting the statutes and approving the budget. Moreover, in consultation with the academic council (senate-type body), the board decides on staffing policies and approves the regulations of the research units.

Apart from its role in electing and dismissing the rector, the academic council is responsible for adopting the strategic development plan and making decisions on academic matters. The law designates the academic council as the highest representative body.

The size of the academic council is proportional to the number of university components, i.e. research institutes and faculties. Therefore, the number varies from university to university. The academic council comprises only academic staff (professors and researchers), while the board (which is larger and more representative) consists of academic staff, as well as students and the library head. Universities may decide on the shares allocated to these different groups. Neither of these governing bodies includes external members. The rector chairs the academic council ex officio but cannot act as chair of the board.

The higher education law also includes provisions regarding the rector, chancellor (head of administration), and the head of the quality assurance unit.

Structures

While universities may decide on academic structures, decisions regarding research institutes[3] require external authorisation because they receive funding from the ministry. For example, changes to the structure of research institutes (such as mergers between institutes) would require ministerial approval.

State universities are restricted in their capacity to establish legal entities (or profit or not). Permission from the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development is mandatory.

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2   While 'board of representatives', the board-type body of Georgian public universities, is traditionally called senate, for the sake of clarity and consistency with Scorecard terminology, it is referred to as 'board' in this document. Whereas the 'academic council' is considered as the senate-type body.

3   It is worth noting that, during the Soviet regime, research institutes were decoupled from universities, and they operated as independent entities. In 2011, they were reintegrated into universities.

Financial autonomy

Public funding allocation

The funding model in Georgia is tuition fee-dependent, based on the "money follows the student" principle. As a result, public funding allocation can be considered annual. Prospective students must go through a unified exam and based on the weighted score, they are eligible for 100%, 70%, or 50% of the grants.[4] In the case of a full voucher (100%), universities receive 2,250 Georgian lari[5] per supported student from the state, which is the maximum fixed amount, irrespective of the degree level. All students who succeed in the unified exam are eligible for these vouchers, regardless of their choice of higher education institution. Therefore, the state finances both public and private universities through students' enrolment.

Universities also receive pre-allocated public funds for their research institutes. Universities have no capacity to shift public funds internally. The universities may also receive funds from the ministry in the context of infrastructure projects.

Financial management

The surplus left from tuition fees and infrastructure projects may be kept without specific restrictions. However, remaining funds from other grants (i.e. funding for research institutes) must be returned.

Georgian universities may borrow money from financial markets, but depending on the case, it may require approval from external authorities, such as the Ministry of Education and Science, or the Ministry of Finances.

Universities may own buildings but require external approval to sell them.

Tuition fees

The ministry sets a maximum limit for tuition fees at all degree levels. Subsequently, public universities may charge tuition fees to students not benefitting from state support, but they cannot exceed the set ceiling. Nevertheless, since December 2011 there has been a margin of flexibility, and public universities may set different fees for certain programmes (notably joint programmes), although the approval of an external authority is mandatory. Private institutions are not subject to the ceiling and may set tuition fees freely.

Universities decide individually on tuition fees for international students. Therefore, students with non-Georgian nationality are subject to different tuition fees.

The government has established a list of programmes[6] belonging to a total of 21 academic fields of 10 public universities, where enrolment is entirely subsidised by the state. These fields include, for example, teacher training, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, economics, history.

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4 Grants, scholarships, or voucher are interchangeable terms used in this context.
5 Approximately €800, converted via InforEuro, March 2023.
6 https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/5220541?publication=0

Staffing autonomy

Recruitment

Senior academic and administrative staff can be recruited autonomously by universities through open competition, and respecting the principles of transparency, equality, and fair competition. Modalities may be elaborated on in the statutes.

Regarding academic personnel, the law differentiates between professor, associate professor, assistant professor, and assistant positions. The senior administrative positions prescribed by law are head of the institution (rector), head of the administration (chancellor), head of educational units (deans), and head of the quality assurance service. The statutes may outline further provisions.

Salaries

Georgian universities may decide on salaries for academic staff, but the remuneration of senior administrative staff is regulated, as the law provides a range of coefficients to be used to fix salaries. For instance, the rector's salary shall be determined within a range defined by multiplying the maximum amount of a professor's remuneration by a coefficient not less than 1.15 and not more than 1.35.

Careers

There are no sector-specific regulations concerning the dismissal of academic or administrative staff and national labour regulations apply. Staff may be dismissed because of gross misconduct, or other cases determined by the university statutes and Labour law.

The Law on Higher Education does not contain provisions regarding the promotion of staff. Therefore, universities are generally free to promote their staff. However, akin to the recruitment process, the principles of open competition and transparency should be respected. The statutes include further regulations, and a special committee may be set up, whose members may be drawn from inside and outside the university.

Academic autonomy

Student enrolment

The overall number of students enrolled by each institution must be approved by the National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE). Faculties develop proposals drawing upon their human and material resources, which must first be approved internally. The ministry decides on the number of state-funded places and the number of vouchers granted to successful applicants. Universities are free to decide on the number of fee-paying students.

The admission process at bachelor's degree level is entirely regulated by the external authority. Prospective students must undertake the standardised exam, also known as the 'Unified National Exam', and score enough points to enter university. Institutions may decide on the compulsory subjects for examination and coefficients and may increase the threshold for admission for some bachelor's degree programmes. At master's degree level, there is a two-tier admission process, in which universities have more decision-making capacity. In the first part, prospective students must go through a similar exam, while in the second part, universities typically conduct exams or interviews. Admission to doctoral programmes is fully controlled by the universities themselves.

Degree programmes

Programme accreditation is technically voluntary for bachelor's and master's degree programmes.[7] However, the law states that only accredited programmes are eligible for the voucher system and thus bring public funding to the university. Hence, universities traditionally tend to accredit all their programmes. Furthermore, programme accreditation is mandatory for regulated professions (medicine, law, teacher education, maritime education, veterinary medicine) and doctoral programmes.

Universities may autonomously terminate programmes, by not opening new calls for enrolment in such cases. Students' best interests should be considered.

If universities want to deliver programmes in languages other than Georgian, they must obtain ministerial approval. In the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia, the languages of instruction are Georgian and Abkhazian. Currently, slightly over 150 degree programmes are delivered in a foreign language.

Georgian universities are autonomous to design the content of the programmes, while respecting the National Qualification Framework and sectoral benchmarks.

External quality assurance

The quality assurance system entails both institutional and programme accreditation. In 2022, cluster accreditation was introduced, allowing up to eight programmes to be thematically grouped. Individual programme accreditation remains possible if there are no clustering options.

Programme accreditation is predominantly carried out by NCEQE. According to the accreditation charter, EQAR and ENQA-registered agencies may also evaluate programmes, although the outcome must be later validated by NCEQE. Apart from EQAR and ENQA-listed agencies, other international agencies may accredit programmes, but in this case, the agency must be recognised by NCEQE.

Institutional accreditation, also known as authorisation, is mandatory ex-ante for institutions seeking to operate, as well as every six years for all institutions. NCEQE is the sole authority responsible for carrying out the authorisation process.

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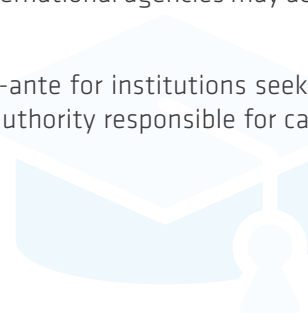
7   The situation changed in 2022 and is described under 'Recent developments'.

Recent developments

The funding model heavily depends on tuition fees, which incentivise universities to increase student intake each year. Negative implications of the current funding model have prompted a long-running discussion on possible reforms. Plans have included the possible adoption of a performance-based model in the short to medium term.

Decree N83/N, issued by the Ministry of Education and Science on July 8, 2022, has made programme accreditation mandatory, which until then was voluntary.

Views from the sector

The fact that universities may not include external members in their governing bodies has been seen as limiting by the sector.

In contradiction with the current funding model, whereby the economic activities of the university have been deemed important, public universities face difficulties to create for-profit entities, which hampers their entrepreneurial and commercial activities. The sector has voiced concerns in this area and calls for greater flexibility.

The external quality assurance process has been in transition following Georgia's joining the Bologna Process in 2005. With cluster accreditation the processes are more cost-effective and organised, as well as less resource intensive.

The sector highlights that the internationalisation of Georgian higher education should be given more attention politically and requires further efforts and championing.

Despite a high degree of staffing autonomy, the sector would like to see a better definition of the status of professorships and clarity on aspects such as pension.

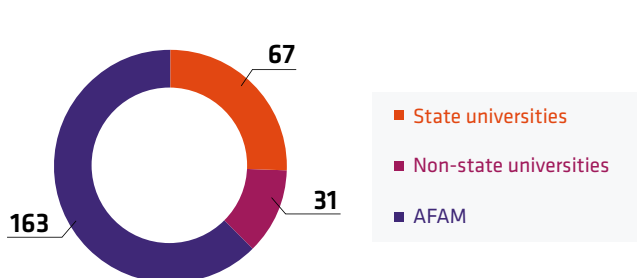# Autonomy of public universities in

Italy

Higher education landscape

The Italian higher education sector is composed of state universities (including polytechnics), non-state universities as well as so-called 'AFAM' institutions, which offer programmes at the three cycles in arts, music, and dance.

State and non-state universities are subject to the same legal framework. However, non-state universities benefit from greater autonomy, notably with regard to governing modalities, as well as fixing wages and tuition fees.

State universities account for 85% of the student population. While non-state universities represent roughly a quarter of all Italian universities, they enrol only around 12% of the students.[1]
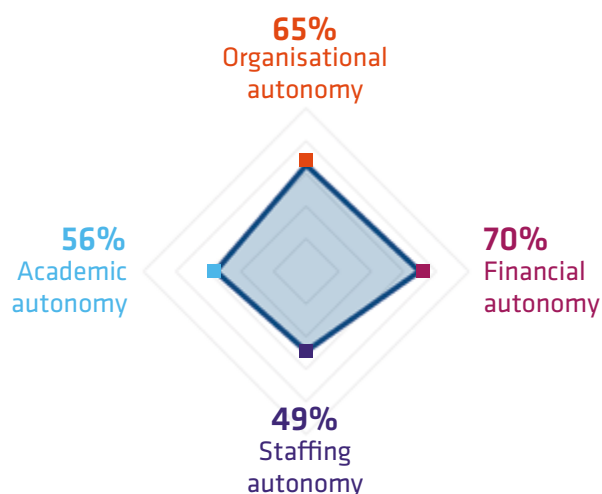
Graph 1. Higher education sector in Italy

67
31
163

- State universities
- Non-state universities
- AFAM

Graph 2. Distribution of student population in Italy

3%
12%
85%

- State universities
- Non-state universities
- AFAM
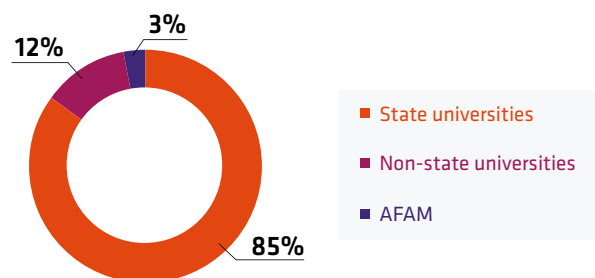
1   Graphs use data for the academic year 2021/2022 retrieved from Ministero dell'Università e della Ricerca. Figures are rounded up to the nearest full number for readability. http://ustat.miur.it/dati/didattica/italia/atenei#tabstudenti

Factsheet

65%
Organisational autonomy

56%
Academic autonomy

70%
Financial autonomy

49%
Staffing autonomy

Autonomy dimension	2010	2017		2022		2022 Cluster	Rank
Organisational autonomy	56%	65%	↗	65%	→	Medium high	19
Financial autonomy	70%	70%	→	70%	→	Medium high	10
Staffing autonomy[2]	49%	49%	→	49%	→	Medium low	29
Academic autonomy	57%	56%	↘	56%	→	Medium low	20

Timeline

2016 Students Act (Law n.232 of 11 December 2016) allowing universities to differentiate between tuition fee levels for national/EU students and international students

2020 Split of the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research into the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Universities and Research

Notwithstanding significant stability in scoring, it is important to mention that the impact of certain developments, including possible legal amendments, cannot be captured by the Scorecard, as they may fall beyond its scope. Therefore, stability with respect to scoring must not necessarily be interpreted as absence of system-level change.

The following description pertains exclusively to the public higher education sector unless otherwise specified.

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2 Corrections were applied to the 2010 and 2017 data to reflect regulations applying to all senior academic positions and some of the senior administrative positions, concerning recruitment, salaries and dismissal.

Organisational autonomy

Statutes

Changes made to university statutes must be approved by the minister.

Executive leadership

The law prescribes that universities must elect their executive head (rector), and a ministerial decree confirms the appointment. The specific selection is procedure is outlined in each university's statutes.

The law stipulates the criteria for eligibility to the position of rector, requesting that candidates are full professors employed in Italy.

Since 2010, the law sets the term of office for the rector to a fixed duration of six years, without the possibility of renewal.

The procedure for dismissing the rector is determined by the 2010 law and is fully internal to the university.

Governance bodies

Italian universities have a dual governance structure consisting of both board/council and senate bodies. The council oversees the institutional strategy, while the senate focuses on academic matters. Guidelines on academic structures are outlined in the law.

The council is composed of a maximum of 11 members, including the rector and student representatives. Universities decide on representation and proportions of academic and administrative staff within the council.

The law determines that the council must include a minimum of three external members (or two, should the total number of members in the council be lower than 11). The share of external members in council varies among universities. While most universities have the minimum number of external members, some exceptions have a majority of external members. The statutes specify the duration of the council's mandate, which may not exceed four years, can be repeated once and can also be scaled in several phases to ensure gradual renewal.

The general competences of members of governing bodies are stated in the law, and they should have professional standing. Universities are required to appoint persons with specific expertise, such as business and financial experience, and may include academics from other universities, representatives from public authorities and individuals from the arts and culture sector. The procedure does not involve external authorities.

The university senate cannot exceed 35 members. They are elected for a non-renewable mandate of maximum four years. The law specifies that the senate includes the rector and guarantees student representation (at least 15%). At least two-thirds of the senate members must be tenured professors, at least one third of whom are department heads, elected in a way that guarantees the representation of the various disciplinary areas of the university.

Structures

The 2010 law includes guidelines regarding the academic structures of Italian universities, which are composed of departments (rules apply regarding the minimum number of academic staff necessary to establish a department).

They may also establish both for-profit and non-for-profit legal entities.
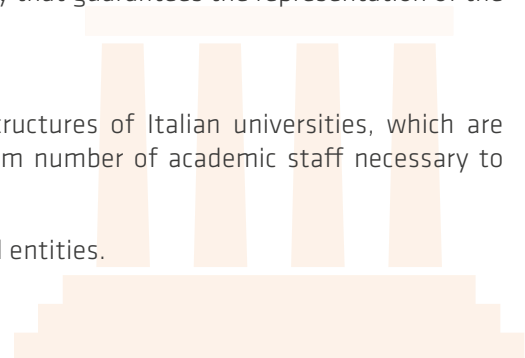
Financial autonomy

Public funding allocation

Italian universities receive public funding through an annual block grant with no restrictions on internal allocation.

The funding model was designed to gradually increase the share of performance-based funding. Currently one quarter of the basic public funding, while historical allocation makes for one third.

Financial management

There is no restriction on keeping surplus on public funds. Universities can borrow funds, up to a specified percentage of the annual public funding they receive. The maximum borrowing percentage is determined by law, taking into account the universities' financial condition.

Universities can own and sell their buildings without restrictions.

Tuition fees

Italian universities can set the level of tuition fees for both EU and international students at all degree levels. However, the overall amount collected from regular national and EU students may not exceed 20% of the public funds received. Since 2016 universities are authorised to introduce differentiated fees for non-EU international students. Some universities have set higher fees for international students, while others have reduced fees for students from developing countries or fully waived fees for students coming from specific countries.

Staffing autonomy

Recruitment

All senior academic staff in Italian universities hold civil servant status. The number of positions is determined by an external authority based on an approved list, and selection is carried out through a competitive process.

Most senior administrative staff in Italian universities also hold civil servant status, and the number of available positions is thus externally regulated. The number of administrative staff on private contracts remains stable. Senior administrative staff who are not hired as civil servants can be recruited freely by universities on private contracts.

The position of director general, a high-level role created in 2010, is filled through private contracts as specified by law. Directors general are typically recruited from university managers, but a minority come from the private sector.

Salaries

Salaries of all senior academic staff, and for most of senior administrative staff, are set by an external authority in accordance with their civil servant status.

The salaries of administrative staff are regulated by a provision referred to as the 'collective contract for workers', which differs from the legislation that regulates the salaries of academic staff.

Careers

The procedures for promotions, which are carried out through public competitions, and dismissals are strictly regulated by civil service rules. Rules regarding senior administrative staff employed on private contracts differ.
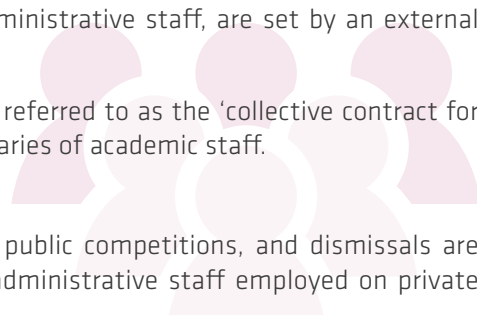
Academic autonomy

Student enrolment

Italian universities decide on the overall number of students and set admission criteria for bachelor's and master's level programmes.

Degree programmes

All new degree programmes, regardless of level, must undergo prior accreditation before being introduced.

Universities do not have complete autonomy in designing the content of their academic programmes, as there are certain externally set constraints and rigidities on curriculum development. Universities can choose the language of instruction for all degree programmes.

Universities can terminate programmes independently.

External quality assurance

Universities must undergo both institutional and programme accreditation, both carried out exclusively by ANVUR (National Agency for the Evaluation of Universities and Research Institutes). ANVUR oversees the national public system for evaluating the quality of universities and research institutions.
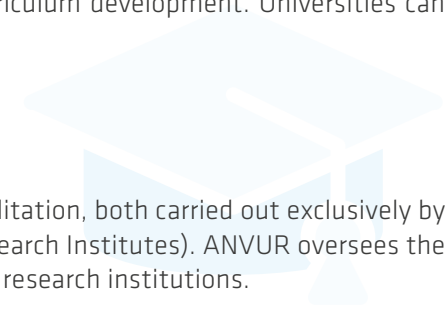
Recent developments

In 2022, the sector expected several reforms to be implemented as part of Italy's Resilience and Recovery plan. Funds allocated to the university sector under the plan amount to over €13 billion.[3] This included an increase in the number of students in higher education, fostered through measures expanding student housing and reforming scholarship policies.

Planned reforms in the field of higher education also sought greater support and guidance to high-school students in their academic paths. One of the most anticipated reforms pertains to degree programmes, with the aim of granting universities greater autonomy in curriculum development. In addition, the government aims at improving internal mobility among Italian universities by establishing a system that encourages students to spend semesters at different universities within Italy.

In 2022, the Italian Parliament debated the topic of researchers' careers, particularly in relation to project-based contracts of limited duration. The proposed measures aimed to simplify the entry process into the tenure track by introducing a single post-doctoral contract followed by the tenure track.

3   For more details on the Italian recovery and resilience plan and its relevance to the higher education sector, see https://www.eua.eu/resources/publications/984:nextgenerationeu-what-do-national-recovery-and-resilience-plans-hold-for-universities.html and https://www.eua.eu/resources/expert-voices/234:a-change-of-pace-for-research-and-education-funding-in-italy.html

Views from the sector

The sector anticipates a positive impact from Italy's Resilience and Recovery plan. Following announced tenders, allocation of funds started in the second quarter of 2022. The sector believes that universities will have several opportunities to obtain targeted funding under the policy priority 'From Research to Business'. This priority aims to support the establishment of new technology centres, strengthen innovation ecosystems, foster research collaboration and finance research infrastructure.

The higher education sector has expressed mixed feelings about the renewed 2010 reform. Particularly, concerns have been raised about the recruitment and retention of new staff, as well as the limited autonomy in utilising research funds. Additionally, ANVUR, the national quality assurance agency, issued guidelines, of which the impact on universities' financial autonomy remains to be clarified.

The sector also regretted that plans on curriculum development reform failed to address structural rigidities related to disciplinary fields at the system level. As a result, while some changes are expected, the broader system is unlikely to be fundamentally challenged. This has become particularly problematic in the context of the European university alliances. Currently, universities are required to obtain prior approval to introduce programmes, which creates difficulties for joint programmes. The Italian rectors' conference (CRUI) advocates for a revision of the law to benefit the entire sector via a comprehensive transition to institutional evaluation.

Autonomy of public universities in
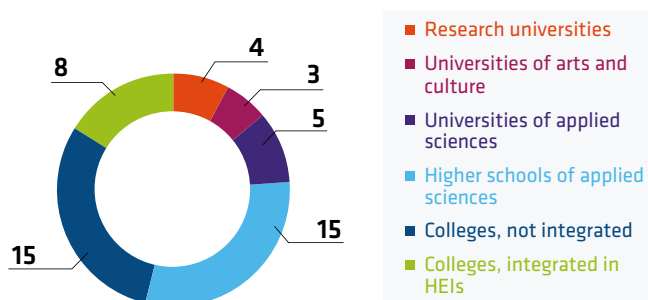# Latvia

Higher education landscape

The Latvian higher education system comprises different types of higher education institutions (HEIs) (augstskola). Universities (universitāte) offer academic programmes at all three levels, have at least 65% of academic staff holding a doctoral degree, publish scientific research, and establish structural and scientific units. Just over half of the entire student body studies at the four 'research universities', while slightly over 30% of students attend universities of applied sciences or higher schools of applied sciences. Colleges (koledža), which offer short-cycle degrees, make up a minor segment of the sector (12% of the student body).

Public HEIs and colleges enrol 77% of students, while 23% attend private institutions. Private universities vary in size but usually enrol fewer than 3,000 students.
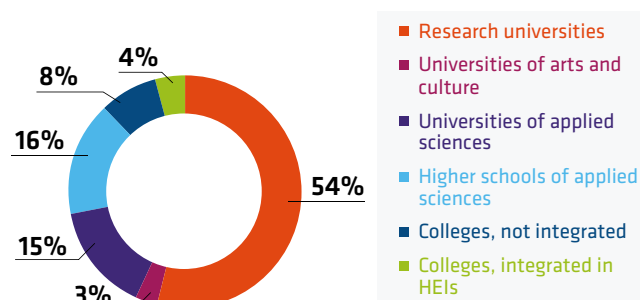
The Law on Higher Education Institutions, first adopted in 1995, regulates the sector. The most recent large-scale amendments of the legal framework took place in 2021, with a reform of the governance model of universities and a new categorisation of institutions (research university, university of arts and culture, university of applied sciences and higher school of applied sciences).

In addition to the introduction of a new typology, since 2022, the Latvian government has made decisions on the merger of five public HEIs with research universities, financing the several-year merger processes from EU Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) funds. These developments reflect the importance given to sectoral consolidation on the political agenda in Latvia.

**Graph 1. Higher education sector in Latvia[1]**

- Research universities
- Universities of arts and culture
- Universities of applied sciences
- Higher schools of applied sciences
- Colleges, not integrated
- Colleges, integrated in HEIs

4, 3, 5, 15, 15, 8

Graph 2. Distribution of student population in Latvia

- Research universities
- Universities of arts and culture
- Universities of applied sciences
- Higher schools of applied sciences
- Colleges, not integrated
- Colleges, integrated in HEIs

54%, 4%, 8%, 16%, 15%, 3%

1   Data from *Overview of Latvian higher education in 2021. Key statistics*, Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia, 2023, https://www.izm.gov.lv/lv/media/18744/download?attachment

Factsheet
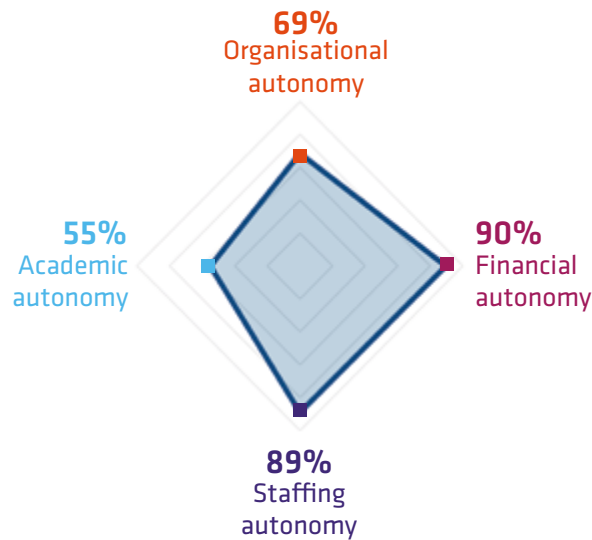
Autonomy dimension	2010	2017		2022		2022 Cluster	Rank
Organisational autonomy	61%	57%	↘	69%	↗	Medium high	16
Financial autonomy	80%	90%	↗	90%	→	High	1
Staffing autonomy	89%	89%	→	89%	→	High	11
Academic autonomy	45%	46%	↗	55%	↗	Medium low	22

Timeline

2019
Opening new study fields requires the authorisation of the founder (the cabinet of ministers in the case of public HEIs), thus validation by government is no longer necessary for private HEIs.

Start of the governance reform process.

2020
Constitutional Court ruling leading to change in regulations regarding the language of instruction.

2021
Introduction of long-term contracts for academic staff.

Amendments to the Law on Higher Education Institutions leading to the definition of different types of universities and a change in the governance model including the introduction of university councils.

2023
Two Constitutional Court rulings on language (private / public universities). New regulation must be adopted by the Parliament by mid-2024.

Notwithstanding significant stability in scoring, it is important to mention that the impact of certain developments, including possible legal amendments, cannot be captured by the Scorecard, as they may fall beyond its scope. Therefore, stability with respect to scoring may not necessarily be interpreted as absence of system-level change.

Organisational autonomy

Statutes

A university's statutes, often referred to as its constitution, are amended and approved internally by the university's constitutional assembly. However, the university must send the amended statutes to the Ministry of Education for ex-post approval. The ministry may reject the statutes, fully or in part, on grounds of non-compliance. In case of rejection, the university must revise the document accordingly.

Executive leadership

In the context of the governance reform initiated in 2019, the selection process for the executive head has changed. The newly established university council proposes one or several candidates selected through open competition, and the constitutional assembly elects the rector. The results of the election no longer require approval of the Cabinet of Ministers. The constitutional assembly retains the right to reject candidates put forward by the university council.

The reform has led to a slight change in the selection criteria for rectors. In addition to holding a doctoral degree (except for universities of arts and culture), and reputable achievements in science or the arts, candidates must also meet Latvian language requirements, de facto limiting foreign candidacies.

The rector's term of office is limited to a maximum of five years. In practice, nearly all universities elect their rector for five years. The rector can be elected for a maximum of two periods.

The dismissal of the rector is an internal matter, with the council, senate, or constitutional assembly initiating the procedure and the decision of the senate and council requiring a two-thirds majority in each body.
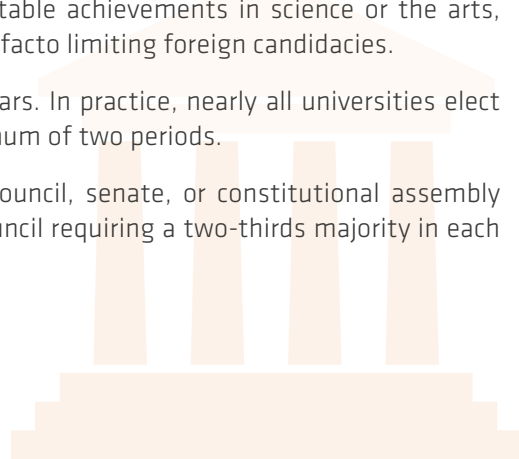
Governance bodies

In 2021, the governance structure of Latvian universities changed from a senate-based unitary model to a dual traditional model, where the council is responsible for funding and strategic oversight and the senate for academic affairs. Neither body has the power to overturn or bypass the other's decisions. Nevertheless, council's financial approval is necessary to effectively implement study programmes that the senate decides to open.

As a result of a compromise between the state and the sector, universities were given the option to retain or abolish the constitutional assembly, but all of them chose to maintain it.

The size of the council depends on the university type, with research universities having 11 council members nominated by the university senate (5), the Cabinet of Ministers - candidates are selected by the ministry - (5) and Latvia's president (1). The senate has the liberty to select internal or external members for the council, but the ministry and country's president may only nominate external members. The only restriction on the senate's selection is that the rector, vice-rector, and deans may not sit on the council. While the senate tends to select internal members, there have been some exceptions. The national rector's conference may propose candidates for the members designated by the ministry and the president, but external authorities have complete control over the member selection process. There has been a tendency to choose public officials and business representatives over higher education professionals as council members.

Previously, universities had the autonomy to determine the composition of the senate and constitutional assembly. However, the law now stipulates maximum limits for both bodies. The constitutional assembly may not exceed 200 members. Universities of applied sciences may have a maximum of 50 senate members while other types of higher education institutions are limited to 25. Council members serve for four years, while the senate and constitutional assembly both receive a mandate of three years.

Structures

Latvian universities have control over their academic structures and legal entities, with the university council acting as main decision-maker in this area. The Law on Governance of Capital Shares and Capital Companies of a Public Person (in force from 2015) applies to universities when creating legal entities.
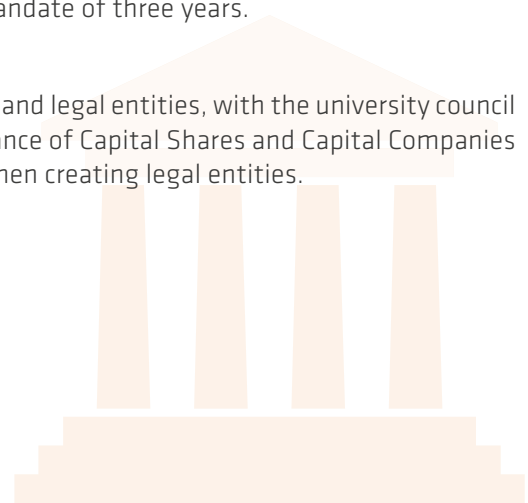
Financial autonomy

Public funding allocation

Public universities receive a block grant for teaching (based on study places) and research (basic funding) on an annual basis, without specific restrictions on how the funds are allocated. Additional funding is distributed according to performance-based criteria.

Financial management

Latvian universities have full capacity to retain surpluses on public funding and to borrow money from the financial market. They are also allowed to own and sell their buildings, subject to government approval of their real estate development plan.

Tuition fees

Universities are free to set fees for non-state-funded national/EU and international students. Despite a slight decline in overall enrolment, the balance between fee-paying students and state-funded students has not evolved significantly. Fee-paying students account for slightly under 60% of the student population.

State funding is allocated exclusively to programmes delivered in Latvian. Enrolment in programmes taught in other languages is subject to fees, irrespective of the student's nationality, and which universities may set autonomously.

Staffing autonomy

Recruitment

Universities autonomously recruit senior academic and administrative staff, with the requirement that academic staff must be proficient in the Latvian language, except for professors teaching programmes delivered in foreign languages.

The fixed-contract system was challenged and subsequently abolished by the Constitutional Court of Latvia, leading to the roll-out of open-ended contracts in universities after the completion of two fixed-term contracts. In 2022, a new academic career framework was under development in collaboration with the World Bank.

Salaries

While universities can set salaries freely for senior academic staff, administrative staff salaries are regulated under a 2010 law framing the remuneration of public employees and setting maximum salaries.

Careers

The dismissal modalities for academic staff have been modified to reflect the change from fixed-term to open-ended contracts and are based on regular staff evaluations. The process includes a general evaluation every six years and a performance evaluation every two years. Termination of the contract may be considered based on an unsatisfactory evaluation or a breach of labour regulations. The dismissal of senior administrative staff remains an internal decision of the university in accordance with the labour regulations.

Promoting senior academic staff requires a higher post to be available. The career framework has evolved, with the possibility of securing open-ended contracts, moving away from the previous practice of competing for renewing fixed-term (six-year) contracts. There are no regulatory restrictions regarding the promotion of senior administrative staff.

Academic autonomy

Student enrolment

The capacity to decide on overall student numbers is shared between universities (for fee-paying places) and the ministry (for state-funded places). Overall numbers are fixed in an annual protocol of agreement, in addition to three-year framework agreements between the universities and the state.

Admission at bachelor's degree level is co-regulated by universities and public authorities and involves a centralised secondary school exam comprising three mandatory subjects: Latvian language, one foreign language and mathematics, which will be supplemented with an exam in life sciences from 2025. Higher education institutions may also determine additional criteria in coordination with the National Higher Education Council.

Latvian universities retain full control of student admission at master's degree level.

Degree programmes

Over the last decade, the quality assurance system has transitioned from programme-based accreditation to study field accreditation, with the caveat that each programme under the respective field is still marked individually. Licensing new programmes in the study fields the university is accredited for is still mandatory. If the university intends to introduce a new study programme outside of its accredited fields, in addition to the licensing of the programme the university must receive authorisation to open a new study field. Since 2012, the decision on opening a new study field at a HEI belongs to the government. For private HEIs, this decision belongs to the founder since 2019.

In this context, the rules regarding the termination of academic programmes have evolved. Specifically, the National Study Quality Commission now has the authority to terminate a programme if it performs poorly during the external evaluation process.

The language of instruction has been a contested matter, leading to several Constitutional Court rulings, as well as a preliminary ruling by Court of Justice of the European Union.[2]

Until 2018, public HEIs were restricted in the choice of the language of instruction, but private institutions did not encounter such limitations. The 2018 amendments that extended the language regulation to private HEIs were contested and brought to the Constitutional Court. In 2020, the Court ruled that such amendments did not comply with the Constitution. An alternative norm adopted the following year, and subsequently disputed, was equally recognised as inconsistent with the Constitution in 2023. The rule allowed universities to deliver programmes in languages other than Latvian (predominantly in English) under the condition that all study programmes were rated as good or excellent during study field accreditation. As a result, by July 2024, the parliament must adopt a new regulation.

External quality assurance

While the study field accreditation remains in place, it is anticipated that from 2025, the quality assurance system will fully switch to institutional accreditation. Latvian universities are now free to select any EQAR-listed agency for external evaluation but the final accreditation decision rests with the National Study Quality Commission.

2 Constitutional Court press release (EN), 16 February 2023: https://www.satv.tiesa.gov.lv/en/press-release/restrictions-on-private-institutions-of-higher-education-to-implement-study-programmes-in-the-official-languages-of-the-european-union-are-uncons-titutional-while-restrictions-on-other-foreign-languag/
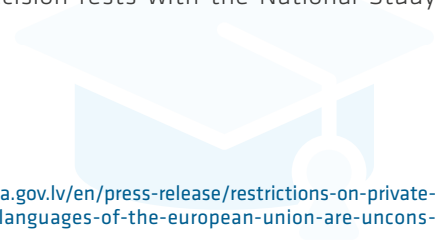
Recent developments

Governance reform

One of the most significant changes in the regulatory framework for Latvian higher education institutions since 2016 is the reform of university governance. In 2021, the law introduced the council as an additional governing body, transforming the previous senate-based governance structure into a dual model.

The preparation phase started in the second semester of 2019, followed by the drafting and consultation phase throughout 2020. Amendments were subsequently passed in June 2021 and came into effect in August 2021. From September 2021, the implementation of the new system began, and the establishment of councils in the universities spanned February to May 2022. The academic year 2022/2023 was therefore the first full year that universities operated under the new governance arrangements. The original proposal changed markedly over time due to multi-sectoral involvement and numerous rounds of discussion, to the benefit of higher education institutions. Nevertheless, further amendments to the law on higher education are still expected.

Funding

Latvian universities' finances are characterised by a heavy dependence on European structural funds. Costs related to the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the rising energy costs linked to the geopolitical situation have not been fully compensated, leaving HEIs to cover the expenses internally.

Also worth noting is the introduction of a new loan system for students who are not state-funded, making loans more accessible. In reaction to the Covid-19 pandemic, the social dimension has been strengthened through the introduction of social stipends and increased stipend amounts.
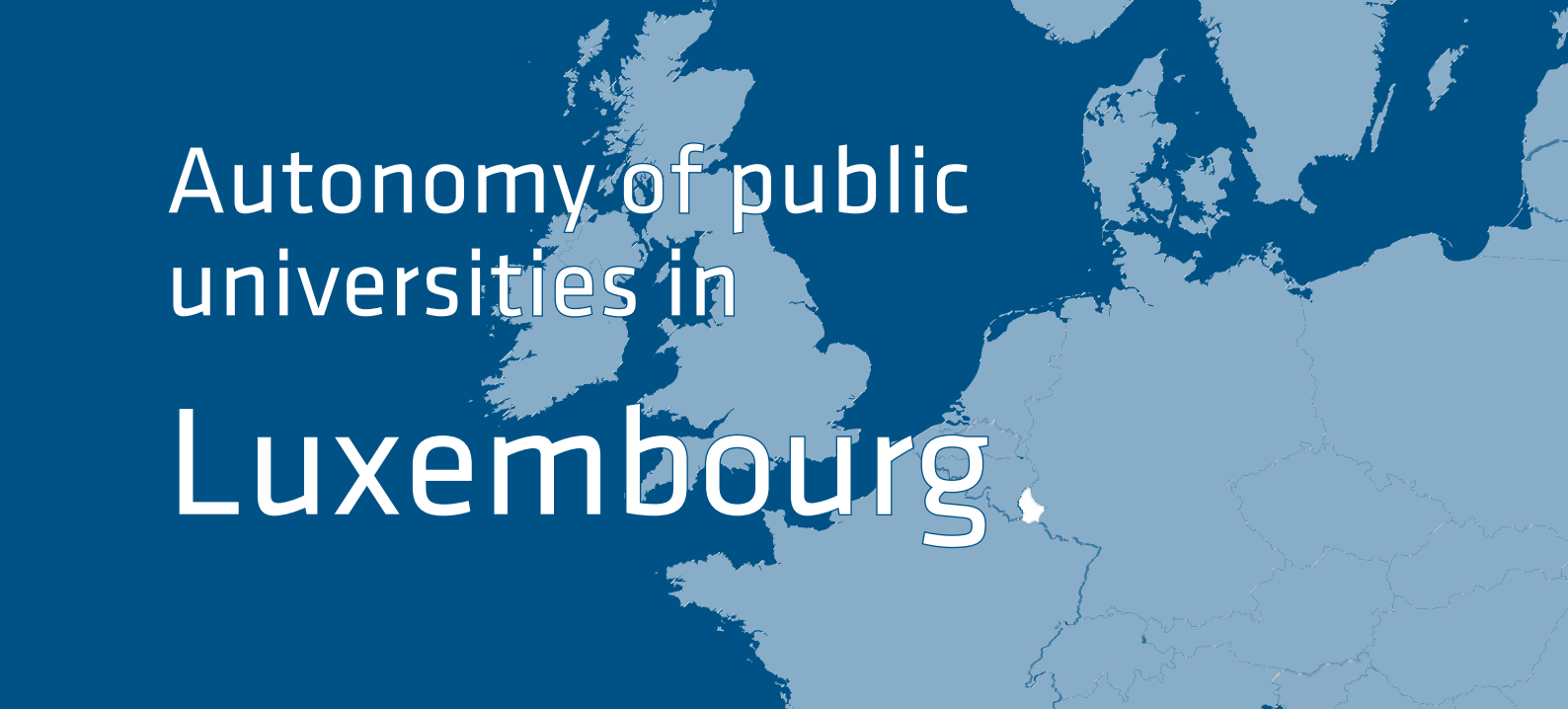
Views from the sector

The governance reform has been accepted by the sector, and HEIs have adapted their structures accordingly. The council members are entrusted to act as champions for their institution. However, the modalities of the transition towards a dual governance model and the selection of external members for the new councils were not adequately communicated to the respective universities. Setting up the first university council was challenging for the institutions considering the short deadlines set by the government.

The academic career reform is largely welcomed by the sector, with the expectation that it will increase predictability and improve remuneration. The reform is also expected to simplify procedures and attract talent to universities.

In 2023, the ministry announced a plan to transition to an institutional funding model for public HEIs, abandoning the current approach based on the number of study places.

The sector supports these changes in principle and calls for the full involvement of HEIs in their design and implementation.

Latvian universities call on public authorities to continue increase funding for university activities. Indeed, the sector is concerned that rising energy costs and inflation may not be compensated through appropriately increased public funding, particularly in the context of the current geopolitical situation, which has led policy makers to prioritise security over education.

Autonomy of public universities in
Luxembourg

## Higher education landscape

The Luxembourgish higher education system is centred on the University of Luxembourg, which is the sole publicly funded higher education institution with university status in the country. The university was founded in 2003 out of the merger of four institutions. The legal framework governing the university's organisation was renewed in 2018.

Private or foreign institutions have also been accredited to provide higher education in Luxembourg.

The University of Luxembourg hosts 5,853 students,[1] of whom 49% are foreign. The following description pertains exclusively to the University of Luxembourg unless otherwise specified.

1   Data retrieved from the European Tertiary Education Register (ETER) for the academic year 2020-2021.

Factsheet

56%
Organisational autonomy

75%
Financial autonomy

89%
Academic autonomy

96%
Staffing autonomy
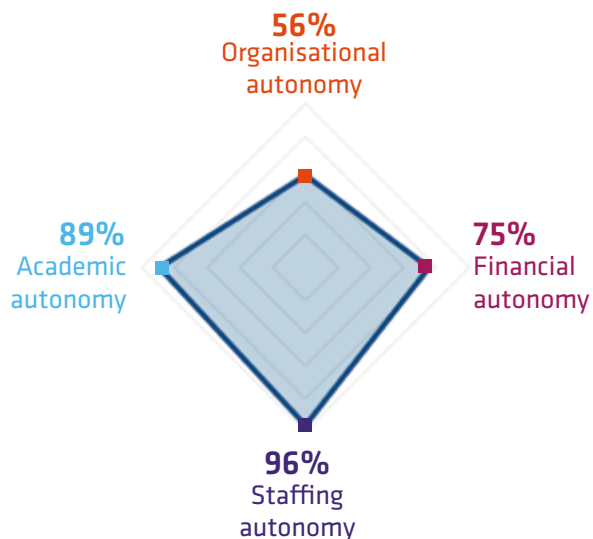
Autonomy dimension	2010	2017		2022		2022 Cluster	Rank
Organisational autonomy	34%	34%	→	56%	↗	Medium low	26
Financial autonomy	91%	91%	→	75%	↘	Medium high	5
Staffing autonomy	87%	94%	↗	96%	↗	High	4
Academic autonomy	89%	89%	→	89%	→	High	3

Timeline

2018   New law on the organisation of the University of Luxembourg

2022   Signature of the new multiannual contract between the university and the ministry

Organisational autonomy

Executive leadership

The process for selecting the executive head of the University of Luxembourg was changed by the 2018 law: the rector is no longer appointed by the government, making it a fully internal process.

The board of governors of the university sets up a recruitment panel. The panel is composed of at least six members, half of whom must be full professors and at least a third must be external to the university. The panel reviews applications and provides a ranked list to the board, which then conducts interviews and selects the new rector. The university council is also consulted in the process.

To be eligible, candidates must be internationally recognised scientists holding the title of full professors, with managerial and governance experience. If the retained candidate is not affiliated to the University of Luxembourg, their appointment as full professor at the University of Luxembourg comes together with their nomination as rector.

The rector's term of office is five years, with the possibility of a second term. The board of governors has the authority to dismiss the rector according to a procedure outlined in the university's internal regulation. The law stipulates that the board may only pass decisions with a minimum of eight votes (out of 13).

The board of governors of the University of Luxembourg is also responsible for nominating vice-rectors, a role previously held by the government before the introduction of the 2018 law.

Governance bodies

The law describes three governing bodies: the board of governors, the rector and the university council (senate-type body). The model is considered dual asymmetric under the Autonomy Scorecard methodology, which does not consider unipersonal bodies (rector). The board concentrates most of the decision-making capacity, while the university council has gained competences on the orientations of study programmes and is consulted on a series of other matters. While some decisions require a compulsory opinion, such as the appointment of rectorate members, budgets, and annual reports, the rector may ask for an opinion in important cases even if it is not compulsory.
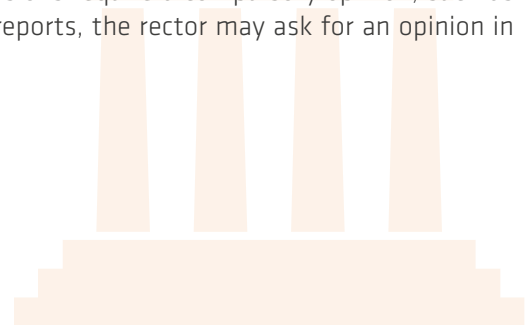
The board of governors is composed of 13 voting members. 11 are appointed by the government for five years. Among these, two are now proposed by the university council (one of whom must be university professor). The remaining nine are selected by the minister. Among these members, at least five must be university professors. They may not hold any other function at the university. The government appoints the chair of the board of governors and may dismiss any of these nine members.

In addition, the board includes as ex-officio members: the student union president and the staff union president, whose term in the board coincides with their respective mandate. The government may not dismiss them. The student union representative now has full voting rights, having previously been an observer. The inclusion of the staff union representative (with full voting rights) is a novelty under the 2018 law.

The minister designates a government commissioner who participates in the board of governors to ensure that university decisions comply with the legal framework. However, the commissioner has no voting rights and may not sit on the recruitment panel for the selection of the rector. The rector also attends board meetings with no voting rights.

The board of governors is thus no longer exclusively composed of external members, who now form a majority (between 9 and 11 out of 13). This marks a change from the pre-2018 situation.

According to the act, the university council includes internal staff, both academic and non-academic, and students, totalling 24 voting members. There are four representatives per faculty, including both professors and scientific staff, six student representatives and four representatives of the interdisciplinary centres (all combined), again comprising professors and scientific staff, as well as two members of the non-academic staff of the university, all of whom are elected. Under the 2018 law, the rector, vice-rectors, and deans attend the council's meetings but have no voting powers. The 24 voting members elect one of them as chairperson.

Structures

The new law grants greater autonomy to the University of Luxembourg in establishing its academic structures. The university is authorised to have up to three faculties and six centres, and it may also redefine the existing faculties or centres. Prior to 2018, the law included the denomination of the university's academic structures.

The University of Luxembourg is allowed to create both for-profit and non-profit legal entities.

Financial autonomy

Public funding allocation

The University of Luxembourg receives public funding through a block grant, with no specific restriction on the internal allocation of the funds. The overall financial framework is negotiated every four years in a contract with the government including key performance indicators, the completion of which conditions the release of the annual funding tranche. The contract may include earmarked funding.

Financial management

The University of Luxembourg can carry over surpluses within the four-year contract, while at the end of the period the government may decide on whether to leave the surplus with the university. The university may borrow money, with the approval of the ministry.

The university is allowed to own and sell buildings, with the authorisation of the government. In practice, however, the institution does not own its buildings; instead, the government lends the facilities rent-free. The university is responsible for the maintenance costs of the facilities.

The government has established that the university should operate on two campuses and must be involved in any discussion regarding real estate. Renting can also be a temporary solution while new buildings are being built by the ministry.

Tuition fees

The 2018 law formalised the procedure for setting tuition fees by specifying that the ministry must approve the fees set by the University of Luxembourg for all students. While the practice existed previously, it was not a legal requirement. There is no distinction between national/EU students and non-EU students. The rectorate has introduced administrative fees without requiring external approval.

Staffing autonomy

Recruitment

Civil servant status is now marginal and only applies to a small percentage of the university's staff (staff who previously worked at the institutions that merged to form the University of Luxembourg in 2003). The university can recruit senior academic and administrative staff autonomously.

However, the university has implemented an internal competitive promotion mechanism for academic staff through a reform introduced in 2018. The process is defined by the rectorate and approved by the board of governors, but the number of promotions available depends on the number of new recruitments.

Salaries

The university decides on salaries for senior academic and administrative staff. The salary grid was renewed, and a new collective bargaining agreement was concluded (the university may also implement the salary grid if negotiations foreseen in the labour law fail). The previous salary grid for academics was based on age, and is now based on experience, which offers more flexibility. These changes were negotiated internally by the rectorate and board.

Careers

The 2018 law specifies the number of internal promotions that the university can execute, as a percentage of recruitments carried out over a certain period. The new law has introduced a system akin to tenure track known as 'prétitularisation conditionnelle'. The system has three levels of professorship, and a promotion to the next level is possible based on an evaluation process that takes place after five years. Decisions about promotion are independent of tenure, meaning that professors with a tenure contract can still be promoted through this mechanism. The university may promote senior administrative staff autonomously.

There are no sector-specific regulations concerning dismissals for senior academic or administrative staff and national labour regulations apply.

Academic autonomy

Student enrolment

The University of Luxembourg may determine the number of student places available. Admission criteria for both bachelor's and master's programme level are set by the university.

Degree programmes

The University of Luxembourg has the autonomy to create and design the content of its degree programmes and may introduce new degree programmes at all levels (bachelor's, masters' and doctoral) without the need for prior accreditation. Similarly, the university has the autonomy to terminate degree programmes.

The University of Luxembourg has the authority to choose the language of instruction for all programmes at both bachelor's and master's levels.

External quality assurance

The University of Luxembourg undergoes mandatory institutional evaluation every four years in a process commissioned by the ministry, which chooses and remunerates the quality assurance provider.

Recent developments

The University of Luxembourg saw a significant increase in autonomy in both governance and academic structures, thanks to the approval of the University Act of 27 June 2018.

The university has received increasing block grant funding from the state; in this positive context, the target of bringing external funding up to 20% of the university's income structure has not been met. In 2022, the university and the ministry signed a new multiannual contract for the period 2022-2025, detailing the funding framework, new objectives and related key performance indicators.

The Resilience and Recovery plan of Luxembourg indicates the government's intention to invest in a new accreditation agency which will help evaluate and promote the quality of the lifelong learning offer in the country.[2]

On 21 July 2023, the Parliament passed the Higher Education Act which frames the activities of private higher education institutions in the country. The University Act of 27 June 2018 has been left substantially unchanged.

2   Luxembourg's recovery and resilience plan, p.24

Views from the sector

The changes brought about by the revision of the law have been viewed as an improvement in terms of institutional autonomy. The academic community has appreciated the increased level of inclusion in decision making, and the changes have been generally considered to be functioning well. No further changes to the regulatory framework are expected in the short term.

Autonomy of public universities in
the Netherlands

Higher education landscape

The Higher Education and Scientific Research Act (1992) regulates all types of higher education institutions in the Netherlands, which include universities, 'hogescholen' (universities of applied sciences), theological and humanist universities, open universities, and private institutions.

There are public and a few 'special' universities. The founder of public universities is the state, while 'special' universities were founded by private foundations (often related to a religion). Public and 'special' universities essentially share the same features, but the latter may deviate from the regulation on some specific aspects, and the government does not appoint their supervisory boards. Both types of institutions are publicly funded.

Private institutions do not receive core public funding; they are subject to the same quality assurance framework, but have larger freedom with respect to staffing matters, fees and programmes.

Universities of applied sciences have the largest share of the student population (around 500,000), while universities enrol about 340,000 students.

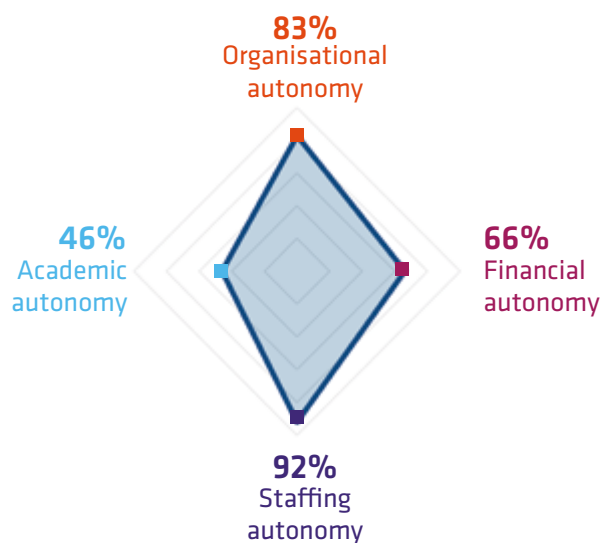**Graph 1.** Composition of the state-supported higher education sector in the Netherlands[1]

- Universities
- Universities of applied sciences
- Theological and humanist universities
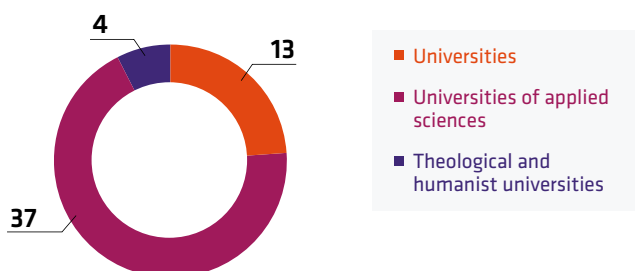
Graph 2. Distribution of students across state-supported universities and universities of applied sciences[2]

- Students at universities
- Students at universities of applied sciences
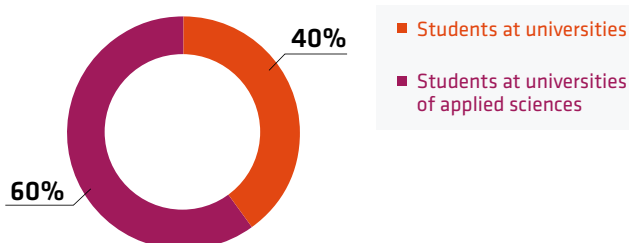
1   Data retrieved from the European Tertiary Education Register (2020). Private providers and the Open University are excluded. The category 'Universities' includes both public and 'special', state-supported universities.
2   Data retrieved from the European Tertiary Education Register (2020); missing data for the Open University. Theological and humanist universities enrol under 1% of the student population (< 1,000 students) and are therefore excluded from the graph for readability. Private providers are excluded.

Factsheet

83% Organisational autonomy

46% Academic autonomy

66% Financial autonomy

92% Staffing autonomy

Autonomy dimension	2010	2017		2022		2022 Cluster	Rank
Organisational autonomy	69%	69%	→	83%	↗	High	7
Financial autonomy[3]	69%	69%	→	66%	↘	Medium high	16
Staffing autonomy	73%	73%	→	92%	↗	High	8
Academic autonomy[4]	46%	46%	→	46%	→	Medium low	29

Timeline

2016
Entry into force of the Enhanced Governance Powers (Higher Education) Act, aimed at empowering internal governing bodies of the universities

Removal of KPIs in performance agreements

Change in student financing system (from grants to loans)

2018
Introduction of 'quality agreements'

2020
The Public Servants Act ends civil servant status for university staff

2023
Reintroduction of basic grants for students

Letter from the Minister of Education, Culture and Science to the House of Representatives on managing the influx of international students in higher education

The following description pertains exclusively to the public higher education sector unless otherwise specified.

3 Corrections were applied for both 2010 and 2017 data regarding the setting of tuition fees to non-EU students at all levels to reflect that these may not be set lower than the legal fee.
4 Corrections were applied for both 2010 and 2017 data regarding the capacity of universities to decide on the language of instruction to reflect existing constraints.

Organisational autonomy

Statutes

Changes to university statutes are typically validated by the supervisory board and do not require validation by public authorities.

Executive leadership

Executive heads (university presidents) are selected through an open recruitment process by the supervisory board. The appointment of the university president no longer requires the approval of the Minister of Science and Technology, although the process may involve informal consultation.

Selection criteria, duration of the term of office, and the dismissal procedure are all internal decisions of the university.

Governance bodies

Dutch universities have atypical dual governance structures with asymmetric characteristics. The executive board is the main decision-making body responsible for strategic decisions, finances, staffing and academic affairs. Next to it, the supervisory board oversees the overall process and essentially holds an accountability function.

The executive board includes the president, vice-president, and rector/rector Magnificus (academic leader) of the university.

The supervisory board is composed of three to five members whose appointment is controlled by the ministry (in the case of public universities) based on the proposal of the institution. The university council (representing staff and students) is involved in the selection procedure of up to two members, who therefore enjoy 'special confidence' from the university community.[5] This has been set up to balance the otherwise administrative and financial focus of the supervisory board.

The Enhanced Governance Powers (Higher Education) Act,[6] passed in 2016, aimed at empowering internal governing bodies, with certain competences being devolved to students and representative councils of staff, as well as to the education and exam committees. Students councils (existing at faculty and at central levels) now approve the university budget headlines, and the education and exam committees independently oversee the organisation of exams.

Structures

Universities may freely decide on their internal academic structures. The law nevertheless prescribes the overall academic structure framework, such as governing bodies at the faculties and the deans, and specifies that each faculty has a student and worker's council (or one that combines both types of representatives). Universities are also allowed to create both for-profit and non-profit legal entities, with the caveat that they may not spend public funds for this purpose. New rules on investing public funding in private activities are currently being developed.

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5   Universities may have a university council (medezeggenschapsraad) which includes both staff and students. They may also set up a works council (ondernemingsraad), which consists of employees only and is governed by the Works Councils Act, which applies to all companies with 50 employees and more. When the educational institution declares this law applicable, they must have a separate council for students (medezeggenschapsraad).
6   'Wet versterking bestuurskracht' (Wvb)

Financial autonomy

Public funding allocation

Public universities receive core public funding via an annual block grant, which they can freely allocate internally. In 2018, the ministry distributed additional funds for the so-called 'quality agreements', for a period of six years (ending 2024). The specific goal was to give more stability in funding initiatives that can improve the quality of education.

Financial management

Dutch universities may keep surpluses on public funding up to a certain financial ratio. If the threshold is exceeded for over three years, the Inspectorate of Education (national body) issues a 'red flag'. This mechanism was set up in the second half of the 2010s and derives from regulations applied to institutions of lower levels of education. Universities can borrow money, as well as own and sell buildings, without specific restrictions.

Tuition fees

There is a single, externally set tuition fee[7] for all bachelor's and master's degree level students enrolled in programmes that receive government funding. Universities determine the 'institutional fee' that is charged to non-EU, foreign students at all levels and students who enrol in a second programme. Institutional fees need to reflect the 'real cost' of delivering education and may not be lower than the legal fee. Most doctoral candidates do not pay tuition fees and are employed by the university as junior researchers.

While the tuition fees regulations have not changed since the previous edition of the Scorecard, the ministry lowered the legal fee to 50% of its previous value for first-year students in compensation for the change in the student financing system (moving from grants to loans) and to lower barriers to entry, in particular for teacher programmes. This was reiterated during the pandemic.

Changes to the 'institutional fee' system, including a possible cap, were initiated with the proposal for a Language and Accessibility Bill in 2020. In April 2023, however, the minister announced his intention to withdraw the bill from the legislative process.

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7   In 2022/23, the legal tuition fee ('wettelijk collegegeld') for full-time courses amounted to roughly 2,200 Euros per academic year.

Staffing autonomy

Recruitment

Dutch universities are free to recruit senior academic and administrative staff.

Salaries

Collective labour agreements including staff salary bands are negotiated between the national university association (Universities of the Netherlands) and the relevant trade unions. Maximum salaries and limits on bonuses and benefits are applied, although different maximum salaries exist in different parts of the education sector (specifically in university hospitals). The rules for payment of the top executive levels apply to all (semi-)public sectors – the Ministry of Education sets rules specifically for the education sector. Size, complexity and number of students are a few of the parameters that determine the limits.

Careers

Universities decide autonomously on promotions of academic and administrative staff.

The Civil Servants (Normalisation of Legal Status) Act (WNRA) provides that from 1 January 2020 civil servants have the same legal status as public sector employees. The Act applies to people who work for a public employer, including university staff. This brings the staff of public and special universities under the same regulatory framework. The process started in the 1990s and the sector has had its own labour agreements (the 'Collective Labour Agreement for Dutch Universities') for over twenty years, meaning that the impact of the 2020 law has been limited, aside from a revised dismissal procedure, which is no longer subject to specific regulations.

Academic autonomy

Student enrolment

The model in the Netherlands continues to be one of free admission to most university programmes, based solely on completion of a sufficient level of secondary education (VWO – 'pre-university education'). In some defined cases (such as medicine), universities negotiate the number of students with the ministry, and are then allowed to cap admission. The lottery system that applied in the medical field has been discontinued, in favour of a selection procedure based on grades and motivation.

Student admission at both bachelor's and master's degree levels is co-regulated by universities and the state. There is a tendency towards greater use of selection processes, for instance requesting a motivation letter or organising a prior assessment.

Degree programmes

Since 2009, new bachelor's and master's degree programmes must undergo a feasibility and relevance check by the Higher Education Efficiency Committee (CDHO) prior to introduction and obtain accreditation to be funded.

When deciding to close programmes, universities must preserve students' rights and ensure that enrolled students are able to complete their education. Termination is thus a lengthy process (up to nine years). According to the terms of the bill currently on hold, universities would have to negotiate with the ministry in cases where there is no equivalent programme offered in the country.

The current law prescribes that Dutch universities must provide all education and exams in Dutch, but also foresees exceptions: a) when the programme is aimed at a certain language; b) when education is delivered by a non-native guest academic; and c) when the specific nature or quality of the programme, or the origin of the students, makes it necessary to deviate from the Dutch language. In practice, this has given significant autonomy to universities to decide on the language of instruction.

A recent proposal for a new law[8] nevertheless includes more constraints in this area. An option considered in this framework is to require the introduction of a Dutch-delivered programme for each programme proposed in a different language, as well as temporary caps on student enrolment in non-Dutch programmes.

Dutch universities may design the content of their degree programmes and courses without constraints.

External quality assurance

Despite changes to the quality assurance framework, fears that quality might be compromised have stalled the transition from programme accreditation to institutional accreditation. The current model continues to rely on programme accreditation, albeit in a slightly lighter format.

The mandatory programme accreditation is carried out by NVAO, the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders.

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8   The withdrawal of the 'Language and Accessibility (Higher and Vocational Education) Bill' was announced in 2023, with a view to propose a new piece of legislation. The pending proposal is expected to propose permanent restrictions on enrolment in non-Dutch language courses.

Recent developments

The Dutch higher education system is facing different pressures, including growing student numbers (particularly in the case of foreign students), financial constraints, and a certain degree of convergence and mission drift, leading to less differentiation between universities and universities of applied sciences. Together, these pressures have drawn attention to issues surrounding student enrolment, selection, and mobility across the two sectors.

Student numbers

The focus on 'excellence programmes' and 'small-scale' education, in a system that remains characterised by free admission, has led to the development of a selective academic offer, notably via the universities' own colleges where the regulated fee system does not apply.

In the absence of actual student selection mechanisms, limiting student numbers for programmes delivered in foreign languages has been used as leverage by the state to address the issue of growing student cohorts, housing issues, and related cost pressures.

Funding

In 2012, in a context of financial constraints and anticipated budget cuts in education and science, the government pushed for the introduction of performance agreements. By 2016, the sector had lobbied to withdraw the associated KPIs to create more flexibility in internal funding allocation.

In 2015/16, student financing changed from grants to loans,[9] freeing up public funds previously tied to grants. This led to the development of 'quality agreements', which were rolled out in 2018 and tied additional funds to measures enhancing the quality of education. In this spirit, the student councils gained a specific role in controlling the use of these funds, generating negotiation processes with university executive boards. The greater focus on accountability has led to extensive reporting compared to the model in place prior to 2016. The current quality agreements are worth €1 billion over six years and run until 2024.

Student enrolment

It is likely that the expected new legislative proposal will affect rules related to language and accessibility of programmes to curb the influx of international students.

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9   For students enrolled in a first-time bachelor's or master's degree programme.

Views from the sector

The Dutch university sector is increasingly concerned about the lack of instruments to steer access considering the ever-growing student cohorts. It calls for better orientation mechanisms that would direct students towards either the university or the university of applied sciences sector (the latter seeing decreasing student numbers).

The student financing system in the Netherlands is likely to undergo reform again, possibly shifting back to student grants, as public pressure grows in that direction. The government coalition agreement of March 2022 included a plan for partial compensation for students who have contracted loans.

Finally, the sector objects to further oversight by the Higher Education Efficiency Committee (CDHO) on the language, feasibility and relevance of bachelor's and master's programmes. While the CDHO does so for newly introduced programmes since 2009, there has been mounting pressure to extend this work to existing programmes even in the absence of legal grounds. The university sector has strongly objected to such intervention.

Autonomy of public universities in

Romania

Higher education landscape

Romanian higher education distinguishes between comprehensive and specialised universities, including polytechnics. Institutions may be either public, private, or affiliated with different ministries, such as the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Ministry of Secret Services. The majority are comprehensive universities, while specialised universities tend to be smaller establishments with diverse profiles, in fields such as medicine, agriculture, arts, and sports. Public institutions accommodate the largest share of students.

Graph 1. Higher education institutions in Romania[1]

52

38

- ■ Public higher education institutions
- ■ Private higher education institutions
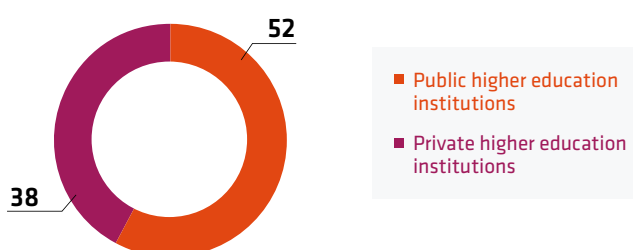
Graph 2. Distribution of the student population in Romania

30%

70%

- ■ Public higher education institutions
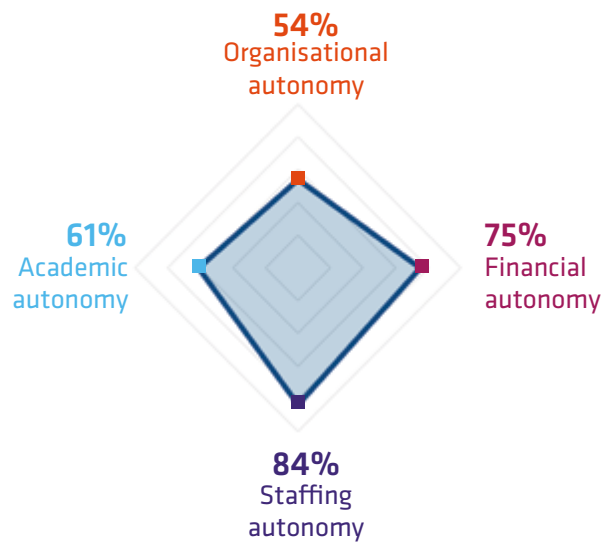- ■ Private higher education institutions
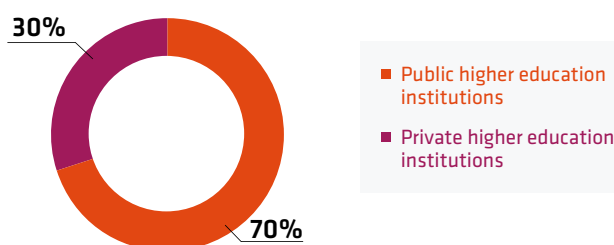
The National Education Law has been amended several times since its adoption in 2011. While the law and the quality assurance system apply to both public and private universities, there are certain differences in organisational, financial and staffing aspects.

Private universities select their rector, who holds responsibility for financial matters. In contrast, public universities distribute managerial competences among various bodies. For example, financial matters at religious and specialised universities are overseen by the respective ministry or the church. Public universities receive state financing while private universities rely on private income. Nonetheless, private universities are eligible to receive structural or project-based funds from the government. In terms of staffing, private universities have more flexibility in establishing their own recruitment procedures.

The following description pertains exclusively to the public higher education sector unless otherwise specified.

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1   2021/2022 data provided by the Romanian Council of Rectors.

Factsheet

54%
Organisational
autonomy

61%
Academic
autonomy

75%
Financial
autonomy

84%
Staffing
autonomy

Autonomy dimension	2022	2022 Cluster	Rank
Organisational autonomy	54%	Medium low	30
Financial autonomy	75%	Medium high	5
Staffing autonomy	84%	High	14
Academic autonomy	61%	Medium high	18

Timeline

2011 — Adoption of the National Education Law
Transfer of property ownership from state to local authorities

2016 — Introduction of an institutional development fund as part of the funding model, as well as quality indicators for the 'supplementary funding' received by universities

2021 — Introduction of formula-based core research funding
Government Act No. 22/2021 (regarding the implementation of joint degrees)

2023 — New Higher Education Law No. 199/2023

Organisational autonomy

Statutes

University statutes, and subsequent changes to them, do not require external validation.

Executive leadership

In Romania, the process of appointing a rector can be carried out either by election or via a selection process. The decision is made through a referendum held six months prior to the appointment, allowing the university community to determine the preferred procedure. In the scenario of an election, all professors, researchers, and students who are members of the faculty council and the senate have the right to vote. Alternatively, the selection procedure involves the formation of a selection committee by the senate. This committee consists of 12 members from both within and outside the university. The committee is responsible for selecting a candidate, and their choice is subject to approval by the senate. It is worth noting that, since 2011, most universities have resorted to elections, with only two universities opting for the selection process.

When selecting a rector, the process considers specific requirements, such as managerial and academic experience.

After the rector is elected or selected, their appointment must be officially approved by the ministry. It may happen that a candidate is rejected by the ministry. In such cases, the university is requested to repeat the selection process.

Irrespective of the procedure, the mandate for the executive head is four years, with the possibility of serving two consecutive terms.

The process of dismissing a rector is regulated by the law, although there is room for interpretation in certain cases. Typically, cases for dismissal include engaging in illegal activities or mismanaging the university's resources. The minister is entitled to recommend the dismissal of the rector to the university senate, and the latter has 30 days to consider the proposal. If the senate disagrees, the ministry, in coordination with the national committee, has the power to replace the rector, as well as reorganise or close the university. There has been a handful of cases when the ministry dismissed the rector.
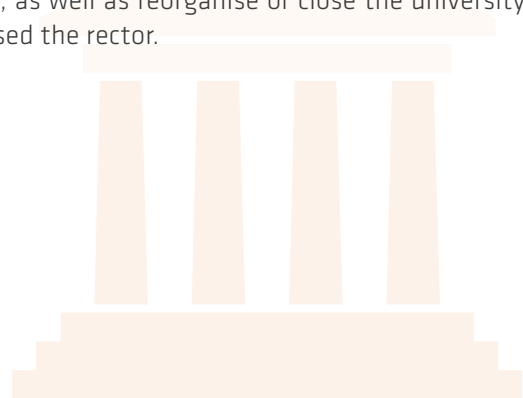
Governance bodies

Romanian higher education institutions have a dual asymmetric governing structure in place, with the main decision-making powers attributed to the senate.

The senate notably guarantees academic freedom, adopts statutes, approves operational and strategic plans as well as the structure and organisation of the institution. The senate also controls the activity of the rector and of the administration board, through specialised commissions.

The senate is composed of teaching and research staff (75%) and students (25%). Members are elected for four years (the duration of the mandate for student members is determined in the university statutes). The senate is led by a president and a vice president.

The council of administration approves the budget execution and the annual budget as well as financial operations above a certain threshold. It also approves proposals for opening some of the teaching and research positions. The council of administration is fully composed of internal members, and comprises the rector (acting as chair), vice-rectors, the general secretary, deans, and a student representative. In universities where staff is organised in a union, a representative of the union shall attend the meetings of the administration board as an observer.

Structures

Universities are legally required to obtain ministerial approval to establish new faculties or departments. However, in practice, there is a certain degree of flexibility in this regard, allowing universities some freedom in establishing new academic units.

Romanian universities are autonomous in creating legal entities. Nevertheless, the state's significant shareholding in these institutions generates financial restrictions. If a university-based spin-off company generates a profit, the funds are typically transferred to the state, thereby creating a less favourable environment for university-led entrepreneurial initiatives.

Financial autonomy

Public funding allocation

Public universities receive an annual block grant, which is divided into broad categories, and there are limited possibilities to move funds across these categories.

Financial management

Universities may keep the surplus from public funding but must secure the approval of the ministry to spend it. Universities may contract loans without needing external approval under a limit fixed by the ministry.

Since 2011, the state has transferred property ownership to local authorities. Universities may therefore neither own nor sell public property, except in certain cases by government decision. However, universities still have the freedom to rent out publicly owned buildings. Any income generated from such rentals must be evenly divided between the university and the relevant public authority.

Tuition fees

The law stipulates that the university senate decides on tuition fees for all degree levels and for fee-paying students, both home/EU and foreign. Students at public universities may benefit from state-funded places. Universities must transfer to the ministry 5% of the amount of tuition fees collected from foreign students. Military institutions are tuition-free.

Staffing autonomy

Recruitment

Universities are free to establish their own recruitment procedures and define related conditions. However, the process can be lengthy due to the requirement of publishing all calls in the official national journal, often delaying the process by several months. This applies to both short-term and long-term contracts.

While universities have the freedom to hire senior administrative staff, the recruitment of candidates for the position of professor is subject to habilitation status, which can only be granted by the ministry-based national committee. The candidate can only be hired as a full professor when the outcome of the habilitation process is positive.

Salaries

Salary bands for both senior academic and administrative staff are prescribed by external authorities.

Careers

There are no specific regulations concerning dismissals for either senior academic or senior administrative staff.

The promotion process for senior administrative staff is regulated internally, whereas for senior academic staff, the law specifies the composition of the selection committee responsible for granting the title of habilitation. To obtain the title, the candidate must first defend their thesis at the university and receive approval from the ministry. The final decision rests with the national committee, and its rulings cannot be appealed by the university.

Academic autonomy

Student enrolment

The law provides the formal framework for admission to ensure equal treatment, while higher education institutions have leeway to develop their own regulations. For instance, there are different requirements in place for art or vocational institutions. Overall, universities can decide on the number of fee-paying students while public authorities set the number of state-funded study places.

Universities are free to set admission criteria at bachelor's and master's degree levels.

Degree programmes

Universities must obtain prior accreditation to introduce any bachelor's and master's degree programmes, whereas, at the doctoral level, there is a cluster accreditation.

Universities may terminate programmes upon notifying the ministry and the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS).

While universities may autonomously design degree programmes, an official registry of disciplines exists which comprehensively lists all disciplines. This registry is updated annually by the government. If universities want to offer a programme outside of this registry, they need to consult with ARACIS.

Universities are free to decide the language of instruction at the bachelor's and master's degree levels.

External quality assurance

Programme accreditation may be carried out by ARACIS or any other EQAR-registered agency. In the case of the latter, national legislation must be respected. In principle, educational programmes must go through provisional authorisation to ensure that the university has enough resources to deliver a programme, which is followed by accreditation. The programme then undergoes an external evaluation every five years. Universities face a penalty and cannot issue diplomas if they deliver a programme without either a provisional authorisation or full programme accreditation.

Recent developments

The Higher Education Law, in force from September 3, 2023, brought several key reforms. The most important are aimed at: reducing university dropouts and bringing university education in line with international standards; extending dual education to higher education and laying the foundations for integrated consortia for dual vocational education; introducing a support programme for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, which will allow students to access educational resources from abroad; ensuring that Romanian diplomas are obtained following a correct academic path; strengthening the rules of ethics and university deontology, more clearly established and well differentiated from disciplinary offences.

Views from the sector

There are concerns within the sector about the limitations imposed on university-led entrepreneurial activities and generally the constraints hindering financial management. The sector is lobbying for the simplification of rules in this regard and advocating for greater autonomy on financial matters.

Moreover, concerns have been raised regarding the habilitation granting process. The national criteria for a professorship are approved by the ministry-based committee. However, these criteria have faced criticism for primarily emphasising the research aspect and neglecting teaching aspects, as well as the professor-student relationship. The composition of the national committee that grants habilitation status has also brought dissatisfaction in the sector. While universities may suggest members for the committee, the ministry decides on the composition. The sector considers that this arrangement has occasionally resulted in biased decision-making. Therefore, there is a growing demand for simplification of the process to address these issues.

Autonomy of public universities in
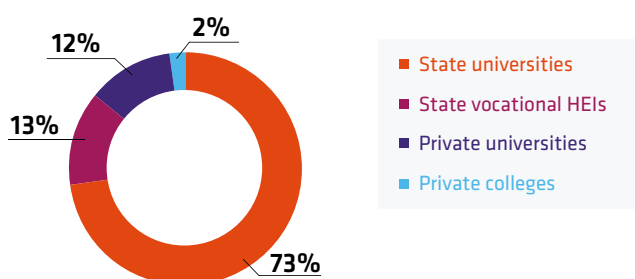
Serbia

Higher education landscape

The Serbian higher education sector differentiates between universities and vocational institutions, which can be either public[1] or private. Notwithstanding the difference in ownership, both public and private universities are subject to the 2017 Law on Higher Education, amended in 2021. Key differences nevertheless apply, with private institutions able to organise themselves, own property, and manage their budget independently and with lesser financial obligations. Civil servant status applies only to employees in public institutions.

Graph 1. Higher education institutions in Serbia[2]

- State universities
- State vocational HEIs
- Private universities
- Private colleges

13, 8, 9, 23
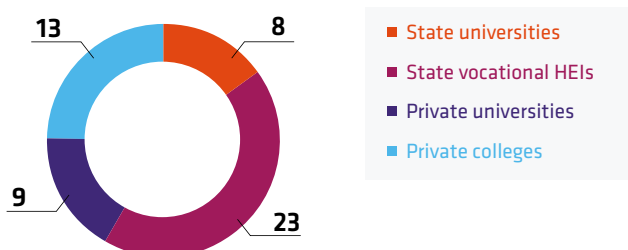
Graph 2. Distribution of the student population in Serbia

2%
12%
13%
73%

- State universities
- State vocational HEIs
- Private universities
- Private colleges

In Serbia, the public higher education system remains characterised by the strong autonomy of faculties vis-à-vis highly decentralised universities. Faculties maintain their own legal entity and hold the main decision-making powers in funding and staffing matters. Both public and private funding flow directly to faculties, enabling them to have control over their budgets. Efforts to promote better integration and alignment within the sector have not gained widespread support.

The following description pertains exclusively to the public higher education sector unless otherwise specified.

1   In Serbia, public institutions are known as state institutions.
2   Data for 2020, sourced from the European Tertiary Education Register.

Factsheet

56%
Organisational
autonomy

49%
Academic
autonomy

40%
Financial
autonomy

39%
Staffing
autonomy
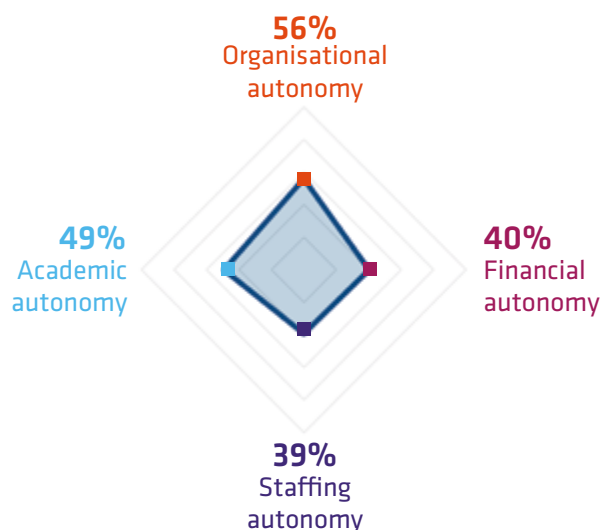
Autonomy dimension[3]	2017	2022		2022 Cluster	Rank
Organisational autonomy	56%	56%	⟶	Medium low	26
Financial autonomy	40%	40%	⟶	Low	30
Staffing autonomy	39%	39%	⟶	Low	32
Academic autonomy	49%	49%	⟶	Medium low	26

Timeline

2017 Reform of the legal framework, adoption of the Law on Higher Education including changes to university governance and to the accreditation committee

2021 Amendments to the law enhancing the role of church authorities over staff and student selection in theology studies

Notwithstanding significant stability in scoring, it is important to mention that the impact of certain developments, including possible legal amendments, cannot be captured by the Scorecard, as they fall beyond its scope. Therefore, stability with respect to scoring may not necessarily be interpreted as absence of system-level change.

3   Several corrections were implemented in all four autonomy dimensions, leading to changes in the 2017 scoring. Retrospective changes concern the following indicators: selection criteria of the executive head, capacity to borrow money, setting of tuition fees, student admission, and dismissal of staff.

Organisational autonomy

Statutes

University statutes and subsequent changes to those do not require external approval, but they must comply with the law.

Executive leadership

The law establishes the general framework for electing the executive head (rector), while the statutes may provide further detail on the process. The election typically involves three main steps: first, one-third of the faculties must endorse the candidates for the positions of rector and vice-rector; next, the senate votes on the endorsed candidates; and finally, the council makes the decision through a majority vote.

The law specifies that candidates must hold a full-time academic position within the university.

The term of office of the rector is three years with the possibility to renew only once (maximum two consecutive terms).

Dismissal of the rector is primarily an internal matter and the decision rests with the council. However, the minister may dismiss the rector upon the recommendation of the Education Inspection, a state body of the Ministry of Education. In such case, the reasons for dismissal are prescribed by the Law on Higher Education.

Governance bodies

Serbian universities have a dual traditional governance structure, with distinct roles for the senate and the council. The senate primarily focuses on academic affairs, encompassing teaching and learning aspects, academic life, quality assurance, and international cooperation. The council assumes strategic oversight and decides on legal matters and financial operations.

The revised legal provisions strengthen the self-organisation of students and their representation in university governing bodies. The council at public universities must now consist of an odd number of members, superior to 17. The law specifies composition rules, with 30% of members appointed by the government (external members, 'representatives of the founder'), 15% students, and the rest being elected within the institution. The selection of external members takes gender equality into account; they represent diverse fields such as art, science, economy, and education. They may not be employees of the institution nor public officials connected to education and science. The president of the council must be selected from the representatives of the university. The share of external members in the council has increased following the 2017 reform.

The senate, regarded as a professional body, must include students (20% of seats). Other provisions regarding size, scope, composition, method of election and term of office, are determined by the university statutes. Traditionally, the senate consists of academic staff and students, representing all faculties and other entities.

Structures

Universities may decide on their academic structures, including the establishment of new faculties or institutes, which is subject to approval by the university council with a two-thirds majority. However, the ministry's approval and financial support are necessary to secure associated funding. Ultimately, the formal decision is taken by the government. Faculties are granted legal personality if they carry out a minimum of three accredited study programmes. The government decides on the establishment, change of status, name or seat, of units with legal personality within a public university.

Universities are free to set up legal entities, both for-profit and non-for-profit.

Financial autonomy

Public funding allocation

In Serbia, public funding is channelled to universities via an annual line-item budget, a now rare practice in Europe which leaves no autonomy to the institution with regard to the internal allocation of funds.

Financial management

Universities may not keep surplus and must return unused public funding. The rectorate as well as other members of the university such as faculties and institutes, are entitled to borrow money from the financial market, but it is not a common practice.

The ownership of buildings depends on the founder and thus, public universities do not own the buildings as the state has ownership rights. They are also explicitly forbidden to liquidate real estate provided by the state without its consent. Universities may own property acquired from bequests and donations.

Tuition fees

Students at Serbian universities are enrolled either on a state-funded or fee-paying basis. The state annually decides on the number of state-funded places. To maintain and secure a state-granted scholarship at public universities, students must perform well academically. Failure to meet academic requirements will make them non-eligible for the grant, and they are required to pay tuition fees. As a result, the number of state-funded places fluctuates each year. The distribution of grants varies based on the level of studies, with a higher number of places funded at the bachelor's degree level, progressively decreasing as the level of studies advances. The trend indicates that approximately one-third of the total number of bachelor's degree students eventually receive state funding, but this figure may vary from year to year.

The tuition fees for self-funded places are determined by universities, taking into account supply and demand, and typically amount to €1,000 per study year. The price varies across disciplines, depending on interest and cost intensity. Each year, the senate approves fee levels, which are publicly released after the ministry gives its approval. Private universities are completely free to decide in this regard.

There are differentiated fees for foreign students, which tend to be set at a higher level. Universities collaborate with the state on this matter.

Staffing autonomy

Recruitment

The academic and administrative staff of Serbian public universities have public employee status.

Universities can decide on recruitment procedures for senior academic staff. Only full professors are permanently employed by universities. Other academic positions are reopened after five years. Faculties may hire additional academic staff provided that their salaries are covered by other income sources.

The ban on hiring administrative staff, introduced in 2014, is still in effect. The ban limits hiring possibilities of fixed-term contract employees to maximum 10% of the total workforce. Universities may only replace staff on temporary leave, which has led to various difficulties and the complex status of certain positions.

Salaries

Salary bands exist for both senior academic and administrative staff, with the possibility for universities to increase the set salaries by up to 30%. Provisions have been implemented to enhance flexibility around salaries. A particular issue is the lack of capacity to offer competitive salaries for IT staff compared to the private sector.

Careers

Promotion procedures for senior academic staff require selection committees composed of five people at the same or higher level than the promotion being considered, with at least one member from another university (in Serbia or abroad). The criteria for promoting academic staff are defined by the National Council for Higher Education, and a post at a higher level must be available. This provision also applies to senior administrative staff. However, the current limitations affecting administrative staff continue to reduce universities' capacity to promote staff.

Dismissal is strictly regulated for both academic and administrative staff regardless of their type of contract, and in practice is limited to cases of misconduct (following the provisions of labour law).

Academic autonomy

Student enrolment

The overall number of students who can be enrolled in Serbian universities is decided by the national accreditation commission based on the universities' capacity and the number of staff. Each faculty is accredited for a certain number of students, and the institution then applies to the ministry for a working permit defining the maximum number of students to be enrolled. The state decides on the number of state-funded places, and the remaining places are available for self-funded students. The limit on student numbers is based on historical factors, but there are variations for certain programmes over the years.

The admission process at bachelor's degree level is based on the entrance score, which is a combination of the scores from the secondary school and the classification exam, organised by the university. The faculties may choose up to three subjects for examination (students choose one), and send the aggregated scores to the central university admission committee, which makes the results publicly available. There is an ongoing discussion on the potential introduction of a secondary education national exam as a basis for university enrolment. Negative demographic trends make it possible to absorb the demand on state-funded places.

 Admission at the master's degree level and at doctoral level is fully in the hands of the faculties.

Degree programmes

All new degree programmes at bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degree levels must be accredited prior to their introduction. The accreditation committee must issue a certificate, after which the programme must be added to the institution's work permit granted by the state.

Universities may choose the language of instruction for their programmes, but state funding is primarily allocated to programmes delivered in the Serbian language. Nevertheless, the government encourages the establishment of study programmes in foreign languages, particularly English, and universities have been incentivised to accredit the same programmes in both languages simultaneously without incurring additional costs. Programmes delivered in English are typically more frequent at master's and doctoral degree levels. Regardless of their citizenship, students enrolled in English-language programmes are required to pay a tuition fee.

Serbian universities may freely decide on the content and design of the programmes.

The faculties may terminate a study programme by opting not to issue a call for enrolment and subsequently removing it from the work permit during the next accreditation phase. The affected students' interests must be protected, and the faculty must ensure a transfer of these students to other active programmes..

External quality assurance

As part of the 2017 reform, the accreditation committee underwent several changes to meet the criteria set by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) which previously assessed that the body lacked independence from the ministry. The committee is now financed by fees from universities and other clients. It accredits faculties every seven years and undergoes a midterm audit.

Serbian universities may thus not choose external quality assurance nor the provider, but they may hire other agencies for other purposes, in addition to the Serbian accreditation committee.
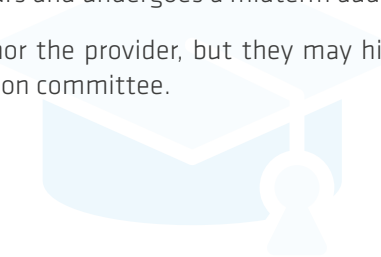
Recent developments

The 2021 amendments to the Law on Higher Education concern institutions that offer academic programmes in the field of theology.

Since the 1950s, the Faculty of Theology of the University of Belgrade has been placed under the responsibility of the Serbian Orthodox Church. In 2004, the government merged the faculty back with the university, but the church retained de facto supervisory authority on the condition that it would not interfere in faculty affairs. However, the situation evolved over the following decade, leading to tensions in 2017 when some academic staff were encouraged to leave. The recent amendments to the law consolidate the church's influence over staffing and student enrolment at this faculty.

Views from the sector

Micromanagement

The sector has raised concerns about the increasing interest of public authorities in actively influencing university management. This interest stems from the resource-dependence dynamics between the state and public universities, with the state arguing that as the primary funder, it should have a greater role in steering university affairs.

However, this is perceived as compromising university autonomy, particularly in the context of demographic decline and pressures from both the government and church authorities. While the regulations themselves may not directly limit university autonomy, the sector underlines that their actual implementation poses significant problems. Trends since 2017 show the state strengthening its position at the expense of university autonomy. With the increased representation of the state in governing bodies, there are concerns that the state might have greater outreach and control within the university.

Funding

The sector stands united in its call for a revision of the funding model. There is currently no standardised formula for calculating the state grant or the value of a state-funded study place, leading to a lack of transparency in the process. Consequently, faculties are incentivised to increase enrolment to cover their basic expenses, which can result in excessive drop-out rates. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that students who fail to meet the academic requirements for retaining the state grant often find themselves juggling work and studies simultaneously, which can have a detrimental impact on their academic progress.

While the government has acknowledged shortcomings of the current model, political sensitivity surrounding this issue has limited progress and substantial changes have yet to be achieved, including in the secondary education system.

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The European University Association (EUA) is the representative organisation of universities and national rectors' conferences in 48 European countries. EUA plays a crucial role in the Bologna Process and in influencing EU policies on higher education, research and innovation. Thanks to its interaction with a range of other European and international organisations, EUA ensures that the voice of European universities is heard wherever decisions are being taken that will impact their activities.

The Association provides unique expertise in higher education and research as well as a forum for exchange of ideas and good practice among universities. The results of EUA's work are made available to members and stakeholders through conferences, seminars, websites and publications.

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