

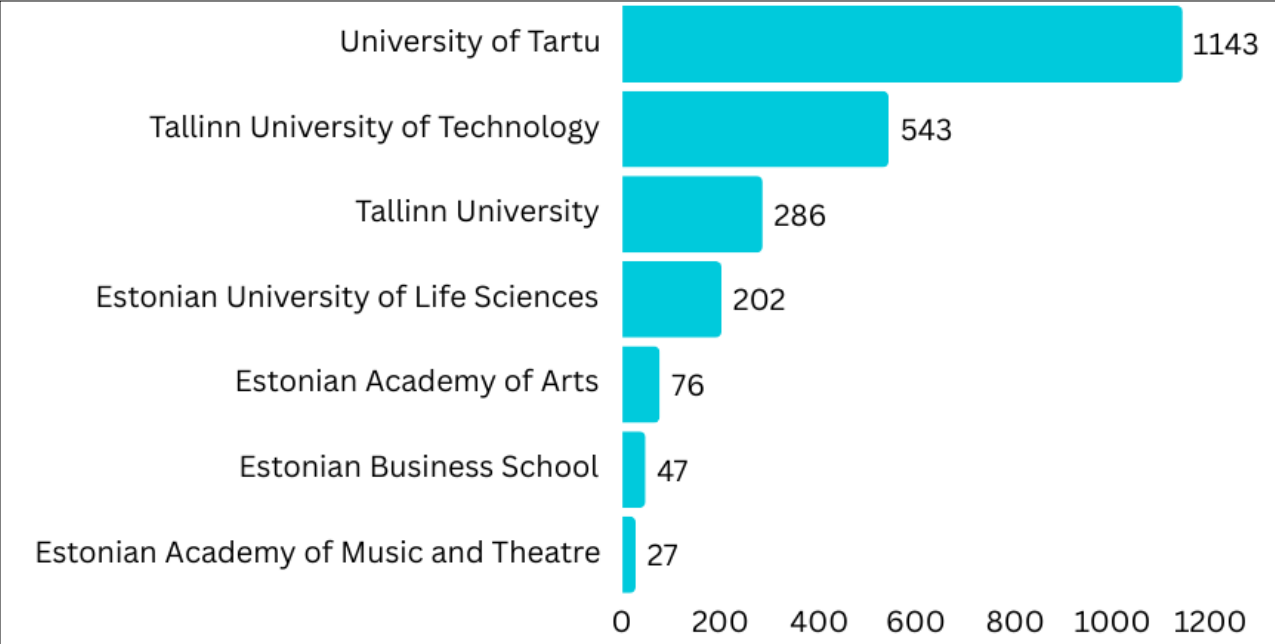
Doctoral education in Estonia today and the underlying partnership between universities

EUA-CDE annual conference, 6 June 2025

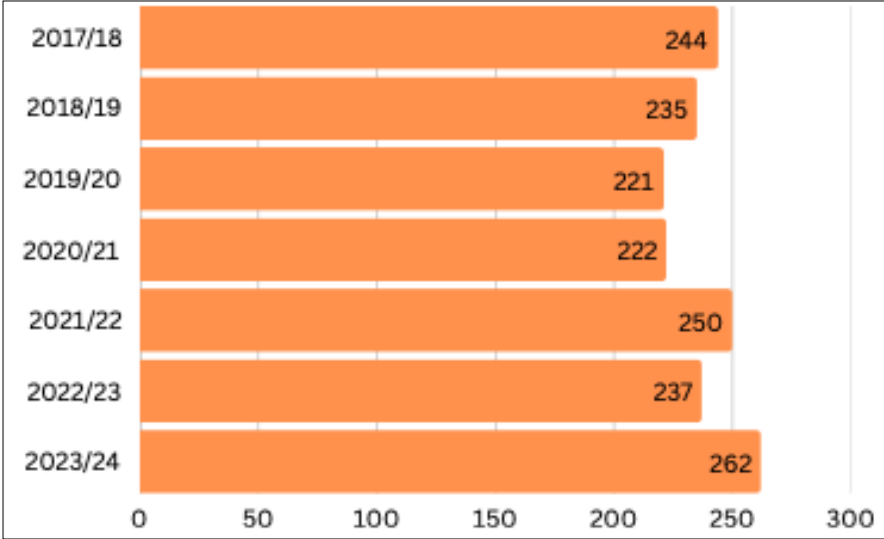
Monika Tasa, University of Tartu
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Ursula Haava, Tallinn University

Estonian universities in numbers today

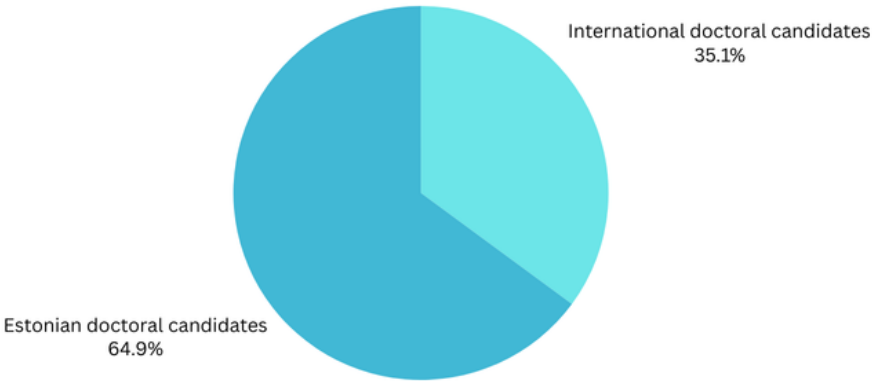
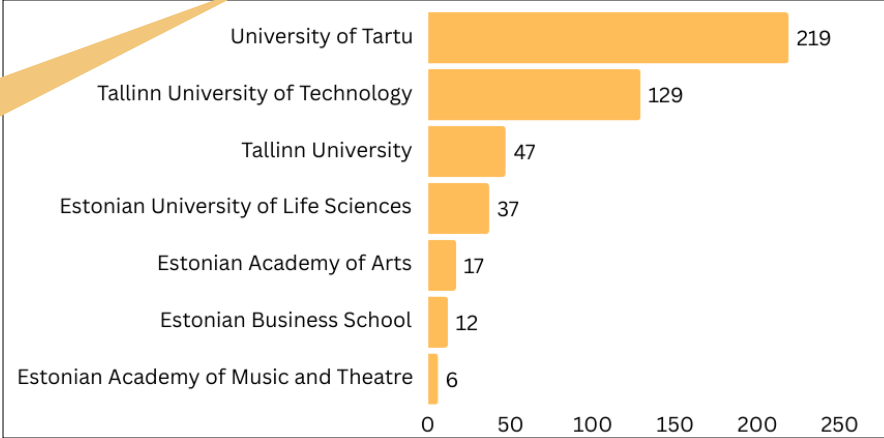
Number of doctoral candidates in 2024/2025 (n=2324)



Total number of graduates



Number of admitted doctoral candidates in 2024/2025 (n=467)



300 state-funded positions per year

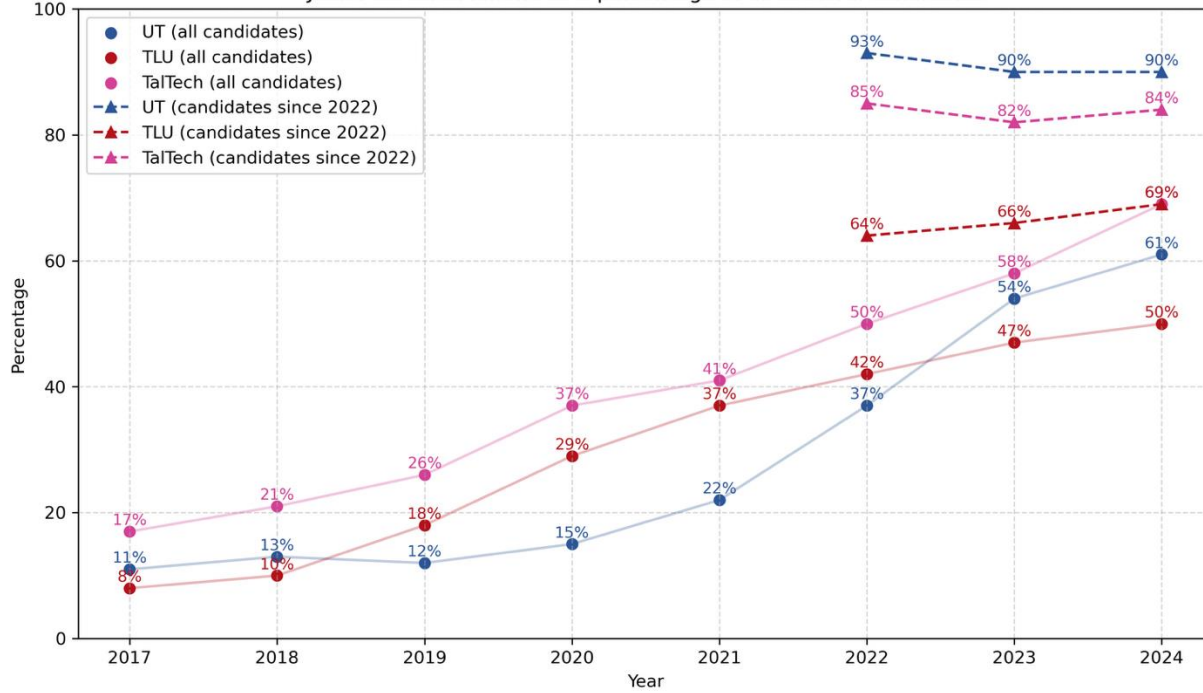
Rationale for the doctoral reform (2022)

- Compared to OECD data, a lower number of PhD holders (in 2016, 8 in 1000 vs. average 10 in 1000)
 - Next generation of academic staff
 - Socio-economic needs
 - Requirements for the doctoral thesis
- Funding for the study place not competitive
 - Doctoral allowance (state-funded position) 660 euros
 - To continue employing doctoral candidates as junior research fellows (since 2016)
 - Employment not generally linked to doctoral studies ('other job')
- Low number of graduates (ca. 230 per year)
 - Length of studies ca. 6 years (standard period 4 years)
 - High number of interrupted studies
- Low value of PhD in Estonian society (incl. job market)
 - Insufficient preparation for a career beyond academia

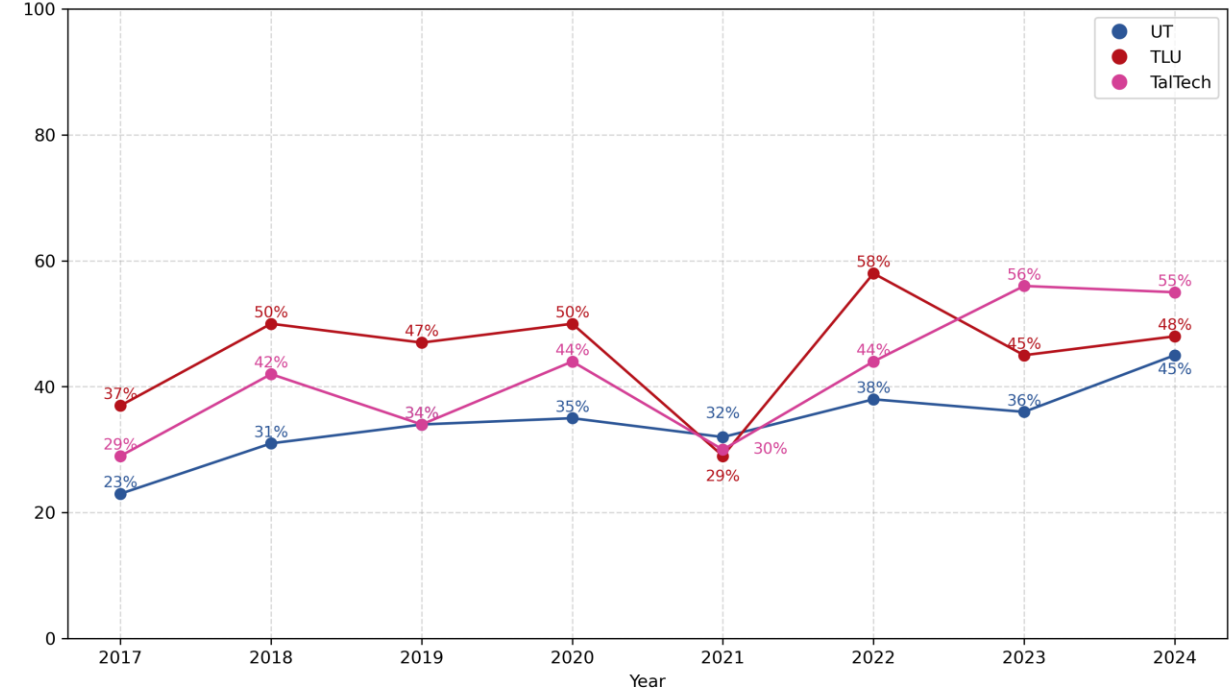
Objectives and key changes

- Status and income of the doctoral candidate
 - State-funded positions for junior research fellows (300 per year)
 - Compatible salary, social guarantees
 - Employee and student status
 - Work tasks fixed with the plan for doctoral research and studies
- The number of state-funded positions remained the same
 - Universities support additional doctoral positions
- Flexible and sustainable career model
 - Alternative career paths before, during, and after the PhD
 - Next generation of academic staff: teaching and research in Estonian
 - Intersectoral doctoral studies, specific funding measures
- Quality of doctoral studies
 - Requirements for the thesis
 - Changes in doctoral programmes, stronger focus on transferable skills
 - Research-based studies: research impact, societal needs
 - Supporting and evaluating the doctoral candidate

Junior research fellows as a percentage of all doctoral candidates

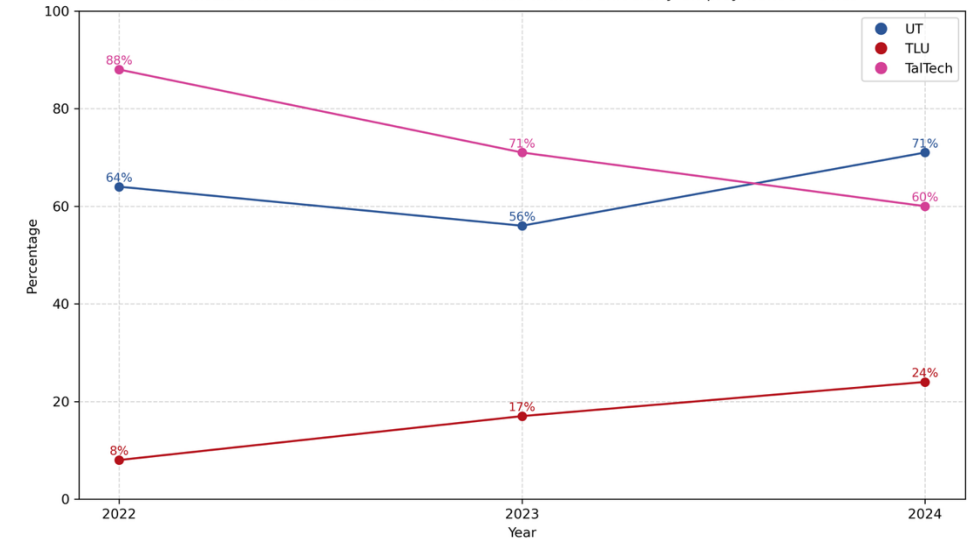


Graduation rate



The impact of the reform in our universities to date

Intersectoral candidates of all candidates without university employment contract



Challenges and next steps

- Implementing the changes
 - Changing the culture (of employment, supervision, etc.)
 - Perceived value of the PhD in Estonian society: joint communication campaign
- Research funding
 - The increase in state-funded positions
 - Competitive salary for the junior research fellow
- Competitive and healthy environment for doctoral candidates
 - Working conditions
 - Career support
 - Joint training offer
 - Networking and communities
 - Support for doctoral supervisors, incl. training
- Diversity – multinational research community, geopolitical challenges
- AI in research and everyday life

Collaboration between universities

- Shared vision and goals
- Quality of doctoral studies
 - Shared standard for the PhD, thesis requirements
 - Programmes, support systems
- Combining resources for joint activities
 - Setting aside the competition
- Maintaining university autonomy
 - Appreciating the diversity, allowing different approaches
- Proactive stance
 - Step-by-step with available resources
 - Impact on policy-making and public opinion
- Equal opportunities for all doctoral candidates in Estonian universities

Networks for doctoral education

- Universities Estonia (Council of Rectors)
- The Estonian Young Academy of Sciences
- Estonian Doctoral School (2024)
 - Vice Rectors for Research (Steering Council)
 - Senior specialists for doctoral studies / project managers
 - Programme directors, academic staff (Cooperation Board, Research Councils)
- Professional support staff in doctoral studies network of Estonian universities



Thank you!

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