

Where European students are enrolled?

Unitary and binary systems compared

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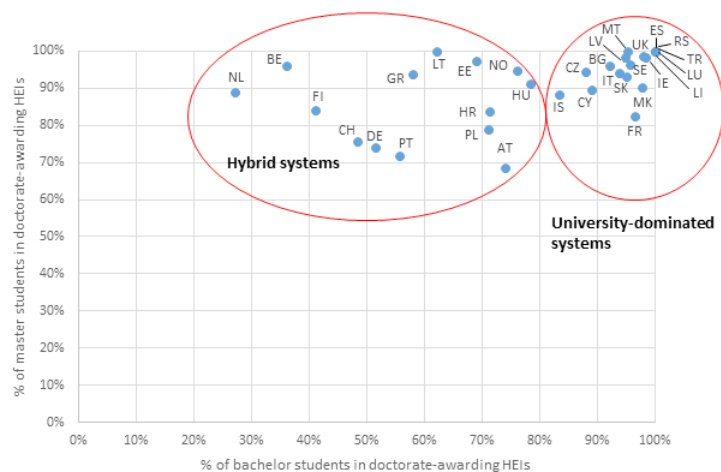
Newsletter

Traditionally, it is considered that even for students at the bachelor and master levels, it is an advantage to study in research universities, since students would be more directly exposed to novel research results. However, especially at the bachelor level, tertiary education has now become a mass undertaking, which should prepare students to the labor market and transmit standard contents, so this advantage is less obvious. Some scholars argue that research professors are not necessarily good teachers; others that too many students enrolled in research universities impair international competitiveness in research, particularly when comparing with the US.

In this brief, we provide some data from ETER to frame the discussion and to compare the situation between European countries (and the US). First, when looking at the highest degree that higher education institutions are legally allowed to offer, about half of them can offer doctoral degrees (1276 institutions in the 2014 ETER data), most of the remaining offer at least master degrees (964 higher education institutions) and fewer only bachelor degrees (224).

When looking to the number of students, the picture is quite different as many of the non-doctorate awarding higher education institutions are small. On average, 84% of the bachelor students and 88% of the master students are enrolled in institutions that award doctoral degrees. A closer look reveals different national situations (see Figure below). In most European countries, including large countries as UK, Spain, Italy and France, nearly all students are enrolled in doctorate-awarding institutions. However, we can identify a group of countries where between one-third and two-thirds of the bachelor students

Figure: Share of students at the bachelor and master level enrolled in HEIs that award doctoral degrees



are enrolled in doctorate-awarding institutions. However, we can identify a group of countries where between one-third and two-thirds of the bachelor students

(and a sizeable share of master students) are enrolled in institutions without doctoral program, like colleges, Polytechnics or Fachhochschulen. The structure of these national systems therefore somewhat resembles the US, where about 2/3 of the undergraduate students study outside the university sector. Such 'binary' systems include some of the best European countries in terms of scientific output and innovation, like Germany, Finland, Netherlands and Finland.

Variables and data availability

ETER provides fine-grained data on the distribution by educational level of students and graduates adopting the 2011 version of the International Standard Classification of Educational Degrees (ISCED) released by UNESCO, OECD and EUROSTAT. ISCED classifies programs based on their educational level using criteria like the program's content, entry requirements, duration and access to further education. This information is helpful to characterize European HEIs in terms of their educational offerings.

More precisely, ETER provides the number of students and graduates by HEI divided by the following educational levels:

- **ISCED 5. Short-cycle tertiary education.** Tertiary education professional programs, at least two years and usually less than three years of duration.
- **ISCED 6. Bachelor's or equivalent level.** Three to four year programs that do not grant direct access to the doctoral level.
- **ISCED 7. Master's or equivalent level.** Programs following an ISCED 6 diploma and, usually, providing access to the doctoral level (ISCED 8).
- **ISCED 7 long Master's or equivalent level.** Programs that award a first tertiary education degree of at least five years duration and that usually grant access to the doctoral level (ISCED 8).
- **ISCED 8. Doctoral or equivalent level.**

The availability of data concerning ISCED levels in the ETER database is in general excellent. Total numbers of students and graduates at levels ISCED5-7 are available for 97%, and 94% of the institutions respectively (ETER 2014 edition), while the figures by individual ISCED levels are available for 84% to 95% of the HEIs, due to some smaller HEIs not providing the information. Data are available for 92% of the institutions included in ETER for ISCED8 students and 75% for ISCED8 graduates.

Additionally, ETER includes two variables for the lowest degree and highest degree that HEIs can legally deliver (ISCED5 to ISCED8; availability of data in 97% of all cases).

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