



THE COUNCIL OF HIGHER EDUCATION

# Higher Education System in Turkey







**The Council of Higher Education  
(COHE)**

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>01</b>	Education in Turkey	5
<b>02</b>	Structure of Turkish Higher Education	6
<b>03</b>	Types of Higher Education Institutions and Academic Units	7
<b>04</b>	European Higher Education Area/ Bologna Process	9
<b>05</b>	Number of HEIs	10
<b>06</b>	Institutional Management of HEIs	13
<b>07</b>	Academic Staff	14
<b>08</b>	Types of Education	15
<b>09</b>	Students	16

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<b>10</b>	Language of Instruction	17
<b>11</b>	Funding	17
<b>12</b>	Admissions	18
<b>13</b>	International Student Admissions	18
<b>14</b>	Tuition Fees	19
<b>15</b>	Financial Support for Students	20
<b>16</b>	Exchange Opportunities	22
<b>17</b>	Degree Equivalency	23
<b>18</b>	Institutional Cooperation	24
<b>19</b>	Related Institutions	25
<b>20</b>	Contact	27

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# 1. Education in Turkey

Formal education in Turkey includes pre-primary education, primary education, secondary education and higher education.

Pre-primary education involves the education of children in the age group of 3 to 5 who have not reached the age of compulsory primary education, on an optional basis.

Primary education involves the education and training of children in the age group of 6 to 13. It includes both elementary and middle schools each of which lasts four years. Primary education is compulsory for all citizens and free at the public schools.

Towards the end of the primary school, pupils are given information about both general and vocational/technical high schools and the kinds of employment they prepare for.

Secondary education comprises of high schools of a general or vocational and/or technical character giving four-year courses following primary education. Secondary education is also compulsory since 2013 and free at the public schools.

Higher Education in Turkey includes all post-secondary institutions, which offers at least two years of formal education. After graduating from high school, students can enroll in higher education which is compatible with the Bologna three-cycle system.

## 2. Structure of Turkish Higher Education

In 1981, in accordance with the new Higher Education Law (No. 2547), the administration of higher education in Turkey was comprehensively restructured. The system thereby became centralized, with all higher education institutions tied to the Council of Higher Education (Yükseköğretim Kurulu, or YÖK). After this restructuring, all higher education institutions were designed as universities. Expansion of higher education throughout the country was achieved, application to higher education was centralized, and a central university exam and placement were introduced. In addition to state universities, non-profit foundation universities started to be established since 1984.

The Council of Higher Education (CoHE) has twenty-one members: one third of its members are directly appointed by the President of the Republic of Turkey by giving priority to the former rectors and successful professors; one third are selected by the Council of Ministers (Cabinet) from among distinguished, high ranking civil servants; one third are selected by the Inter-University Council from among professors who are not members of that Council. The selections of members by the Council of Ministers and the Inter-University Council are subject to approval by the President of the Turkish Republic. Each member is appointed for a renewable term of four years. The President of the Council is appointed by the President of the Republic of Turkey from among the Council members.



Nine members of the Council are elected to an Executive Board to carry out day-to-day functions of the Council. Members of the Executive Board are appointed on a full-time basis.

The Inter-University Council is composed of two persons from each university, the rector and one member elected by the Senate of the university. The main duties are to co-ordinate and evaluate teaching, research and publication activities; to propose measures concerning academic staff; and to establish rules and regulations regarding doctoral work and granting of academic titles and degrees. ([www.uak.gov.tr](http://www.uak.gov.tr))

### **3. Types of Higher Education Institutions and Academic Units**

Higher education institutions can be classified as follows:

Universities, Institutes of High Technology, Post Secondary Vocational Schools, Other Higher Education Institutions (Military and Police Academies). There are two types of universities in Turkey, namely State and Non-profit Foundation Universities. There are following units in the universities:

- **Faculty (College):** A division conducting higher education, scholarly research and publication. Various departments and programs may be connected to it. It carries out an educational program of at least four years duration that culminates with the award of a Bachelor's degree.
- **Graduate School:** An institution in universities concerned with graduate education, scholarly research and applications. Graduate Schools award MA, MSc or PhD degrees.
- **Post-secondary School:** An institution of higher education which is mainly concerned with providing instruction for a specific profession. It carries out eight-semester education.
- **Conservatory:** An institution of higher education in which artists are trained for music and the performing arts. It carries out eight-semester education.
- **Post-secondary Vocational School:** An institution of higher education that is aimed at training human capacity in specific professions and provides instruction lasting four semesters.
- **Research and Application Center:** An institution of higher education carrying out research and applied studies to meet the applied study needs of various areas and to provide preparatory and support activities for various professional areas, with the aim of supporting education in institutions of higher education.

## 4. European Higher Education Area/ Bologna process

Turkey has actively participated in the Bologna Process, which define the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). At its inception in 1999, the Bologna Process is meant to establish European Higher Education Area in order to strengthen the competitiveness and attractiveness of the European higher education and to foster student mobility and employability through the introduction of a system based on undergraduate and postgraduate studies with easily readable programs and degrees. Quality assurance has played an important role from the outset, too. Ministerial Conferences are organized every two years in order to assess the progress made within the EHEA and to decide on the new steps to be taken. For detailed information: <http://www.ehea.info/>

The Bologna Process has been an important opportunity for reconstruction and internationalization of Turkish higher education system. Accordingly, in order to improve the quality, recognition and visibility of higher education institutions in the international level, CoHE as national authority of Bologna Process proceeds practices within this scope. One of these practices is the various projects of National Teams of Bologna Experts financed by the European Commission and coordinated by CoHE since 2004. In addition to these projects, CoHE integrates all higher education institutions in Turkey to the European Higher Education Area with the advice and support of national and international Bologna

Experts. Consequently, academic staff, administrative staff and students have crucial roles in the implementation of this process and in contribute to Turkish higher education system. For detailed information: <http://bologna.yok.gov.tr/>

## 5. Number of HEIs

The number of universities has dramatically increased during the last decade. Around 100 new universities have been established since 2006. As of September 2014, there are 176 universities in Turkey (see Table 1). There are also eight independent post-secondary vocational schools not attached to any university and six other higher education institutes. All of these higher education institutions are recognized and accredited by the CoHE. A list of universities and their contact information is available at [www.yok.gov.tr](http://www.yok.gov.tr).

**Table 1.** The number of higher education institutions in Turkey (2014)

State Universities	104
Non-profit Foundation Universities	72
Independent Post-Secondary Vocational Schools	8
Other Higher Education Institutions (e.g. Military and Police Academies)	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>190</b>

## Degrees

An **Associate's degree (short cycle)** is awarded on completion of a two-year study program. The associate degree programs are offered by the post-secondary vocational schools attached to universities and independent post-secondary vocational schools. Some distance education programs are also available. The associate degree programs may require a period of on-the-job training.

A **Bachelor's degree (1st cycle)** is normally awarded after the completion of a four-year course of study.

The duration of study for dentistry and veterinary medicine programs is five years and that of medicine is six years. The qualifications in these three fields are considered to be the equivalent of a Master's degree.

A **Master's degree program (2nd cycle)** is a two-year program leading to the Master of Arts (MA) or Master of Sciences (MSc). There are two kinds of Master's programs, with or without a thesis. The Master's with thesis program is a two-year program generally consisting of seven courses with a minimum of 21 face-to-face credits followed by submission of a thesis. Generally, non-thesis programs are completed in one and a half years with the completion of ten graduate courses of a minimum 30 credits and a term project.

A **Doctoral degree program (3rd cycle)** is usually an eight-semester program if the student is accepted with a Master's diploma leading to the PhD degree. It consists of a minimum of seven courses, with a

minimum of 21 face-to-face credits, a proficiency exam, a dissertation proposal, a dissertation and its oral defense. After successful completion of the course work and the proficiency exam, students must submit the dissertation and defend it orally in front of an dissertation committee. There is also ten-semester integrated PhD programs which consist of a minimum of fourteen courses, with a minimum of 42 face-to-face credits, a proficiency exam, a dissertation proposal, a dissertation and its oral defense which enable students to apply with a Bachelor degree.

**Specialization in Medicine programs** are equivalent to doctoral degree programs and are carried out in the faculties of medicine, university hospitals and research and training hospitals. For the specialization in medicine, there is a competitive selection examination in various branches of medicine for those graduating from the faculties of medicine. Specialist candidates are required to submit a dissertation and defend it in front of a committee.

**Proficiency in Art** is at least a six-semester post-Master's program in the visual and performing art branches making it equivalent to a Doctorate. It requires the presentation of an original work of art or (in music and the performing arts) a superior, creative performance.

## 6. Institutional Management of HEIs

The Rector chairs the Senate, implements the regulations, and ensures co-ordination among subsidiary organizations attached to the university. In state universities, six candidates for the rectorship are elected by the faculty members of the university by secret ballot. CoHE proposes three of those six candidates to the President of Turkey, who then makes the final selection and appoints the rector. In non-profit foundation universities, the selection of candidates and appointment of the rector are carried out by the Board of Trustees.

**The Senate** is the governing body of a university in terms of academic affairs, composed of the rector, vice-rectors, deans, directors of the graduate schools and the post-secondary vocational schools, as well as a teaching staff member elected for each faculty for a three-year term.

**The University Administrative Board** is chaired by the rector and is composed of the deans and three professors appointed by the Senate for four years. The main duty of this board is to assist the rector in daily administrative duties.

**The Dean** of a faculty is appointed by CoHE from among three candidate professors nominated by the rector.

## 7. Academic Staff

1) Faculty Members with PhD: Teaches courses and supervises students in both undergraduate and graduate programs.

- Professor: The highest academic title.
- Associate Professor: Has successfully fulfilled the requirements of the Inter-University Council.
- Assistant Professor: Has successfully completed doctoral studies.

2) Teaching Staff:

- Lecturer: Teaches various courses and supervises students in undergraduate programs.
- Instructor: Teaches compulsory courses in undergraduate programs.

3) Research Assistants: Research assistants are supporters of principal researchers to assist with conducting research projects in any field by performing various duties related to a study.

4) Support staff: Hired for a specified period by higher education institutions (i.e. specialists, translators, and education planners).



## 8. Types of Education

**Face-to-face Education:** In most of the Turkish Higher Education Institutions, face-to-face type of education is followed. In this type of education, students are required to attend their courses or practical work sessions.

**Distance Education:** Students may also perceive their higher education through various distance education programs. Since 1982, the Open Education Faculty of Anadolu University has offered distance education delivering two-year and four-year undergraduate programs. Today, in addition to the Open Education Faculty of Anadolu University, two other universities (Istanbul University and Ataturk University) also have Open Education Faculties and they also offer many undergraduate programs in different fields. In addition, many other higher education institutions have established Distance Education Centers and have started to offer various on-line and hybrid programs at different levels.

## 9. Students

With the dramatic increase in the number of higher education institutions in the last decade, the higher education has become more accessible in Turkey. As of, 2013-2014 academic year there were approximately 5.5 million higher education students in Turkey (see Table 2). About 39 % of these students were undertaking their studies via distance education, mostly in Open Education Faculties, and 61% via face-to-face education. With recent developments, the higher education gross enrolment rate in Turkey for the relevant age group has passed the 70%. The number of incoming international students is around 55.000 (CoHE, 2014). Besides, with over 80.000 outgoing international students, Turkey is one of the top sending countries in the world (OECD, 2013).

**Table 2.** Total number of students in higher education institutions (2013-2014)

<b>Education Type</b>	<b>State Universities</b>	<b>Foundation Universities</b>	<b>Total</b>
Associate	1.683.044	67.089	1.750.133
Undergraduate	3.139.516	231.172	3.370.688
Master	206.014	56.738	262.752
Doctorate	60.227	5.637	65.864
Proficiency in Art	490	34	524
<b>Total</b>	<b>5.089.291</b>	<b>360.670</b>	<b>5.449.961</b>

Source: [istatistik.yok.gov.tr](http://istatistik.yok.gov.tr) (March, 2014)

## 10. Language of Instruction

The main language of instruction is Turkish in most of the higher education institutions, but some universities use English, German or French as the language of instruction preceded by one-year language preparatory classes. Additionally, some universities have programs in which about 30% of the courses use English as the language of instruction. In recent years, the number of universities which use English as a medium of instruction has significantly increased. In addition, most of the universities which use Turkish as a medium of instruction now also offer courses in English in at least several programs.

## 11. Funding

State higher education institutions are funded by the government budget, based on a detailed itemizing of their expenditures, essentially prepared after consultations based on the previous year's allocations. Income is also received from institutions, fees, payments, publications and sales, movable and immovable property, profits etc. Foundation Universities are funded by their foundations and students.

## 12. Admissions

For admission to all undergraduate programs in Turkey, a valid high school diploma and a sufficient score on the Student Selection and Placement Examinations (YGS and LYS) are required. The YGSs and LYSs are central university entrance examinations administered by the Measurement, Selection and Placement Center ('ÖSYM', <http://www.osym.gov.tr>.) The YGSs are usually administered in April while the LYSs are usually in June, throughout the country simultaneously.

Admission to graduate programs is carried out by the higher education institutions. Admission depends on composite scores which generally take into account the Graduate Education Entrance Examination (ALES), the undergraduate grade point average, and interview results.

## 13. International Student Admissions

International students who wish to undertake their undergraduate studies in Turkey should have completed their secondary education in a high school or similar institution in which the education is equivalent to that of a Turkish high school. They apply directly to the university of their choice, which makes its own selection. International students who wish to pursue their graduate/post-graduate studies

in Turkey also apply directly to the universities, which set their own admission requirements.

“Study in Turkey” is a brand new website developed by the CoHE to inform international students about the higher education system in Turkey. In this website (<http://www.studyinturkey.gov.tr/>) students can use the “edu finder” search area by choosing the language, type, city and area of study to find the best option. Not only general information about Turkish education system are included, but also scholarships, experiences of international students, living conditions, culture and etc. are presented in “Study in Turkey”. So far the website serves in three languages, Turkish, English and Russian, but other common languages like Arabian, Chinese, French and Spanish will be added soon. You can also follow “Study in Turkey” in social network via Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube.

## 14. Tuition Fees

For international students, tuition fees are applied differently in state and non-profit foundation universities and may change from one university to the other. In state universities, the minimum and maximum amounts of tuition fees are decided and announced by the Council of Ministers, taking into consideration the type and duration of study in different disciplines. Then, the university senates decide the exact fees for each program within this scale. In non-profit foundation universities, on the

other hand, tuition fees are decided by the Board of Trustees of the university.

Both in state and non-profit foundation universities, certain percentage of the students admitted to the university are given diverse scholarships. These scholarships may be full or partial tuition waiver; merit or support scholarships. Some of these scholarships may meet academic materials, accommodation, food and beverages, and even certain amount of allowances. In addition to these supports, the student assistantship and the research fellowships may also be available in some programs, especially for graduate students.

## 15. Financial Support for Students

There is a centralized state grant and loan system to support both undergraduate and graduate students with Turkish citizenship. The Higher Education Loan and Dormitory Authority (YURTKUR) is the body responsible for the administration of state loans and lodging in higher education (for more information: <http://www.kyk.gov.tr>). There are also various merit based scholarships and fellowships available to both Turkish and international students.

**Türkiye Scholarships** is a government funded higher education scholarship program designed for all international students in all of the degrees in

higher education institutions in Turkey. Council of Higher Education places the students to a university after the exam and other selection procedures conducted by the Presidency of the Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB). Türkiye Scholarship students receive monthly allowance and they can stay in state university dormitories without paying any fee. Scholarship holders do not pay any tuition or other educational expenses for their study and also they are covered by public health insurance. Additionally, Türkiye Scholarship students get a certain amount of money for their transportation expenses at their first arrival to Turkey and departure after graduation from Turkey. For more detailed information: <http://www.turkiyeburslari.gov.tr>

**The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TÜBİTAK)** also provides financial support for international students via the following programs:

- Undergraduate scholarship program for international students
- Research fellowship program for foreign citizens
- Graduate scholarship program for the least developed countries
- Graduate scholarship program for international students

For more information please visit:  
<http://www.tubitak.gov.tr>

## 16. Exchange Opportunities

There is also an opportunity for international university students to spend one or two semesters in Turkish universities by joining Erasmus or Mevlana exchange programs.

**Erasmus Program** is a European student exchange program offering university students a possibility of studying in another European country for a period of at least 3 months and at maximum 12 months. Erasmus program also offers exchange opportunities for academic staff. Turkey has been the third most successful country (after England and Germany) in the Erasmus Program in 2013. For more information, please visit [http://ec.europa.eu/education/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/index_en.htm)

**Mevlana Exchange Program** is a program which aims the exchange of students and academic staff between the Turkish higher education institutions and higher education institutions of other countries. The program includes all higher education institutions throughout the world regardless of geographical borders. Students from Turkish higher education institutions may study abroad for one or two terms and academic staff may lecture abroad from one week (minimum) to three months (maximum). Accordingly, students and academic staff from any country may benefit from this program being hosted by Turkish higher education institutions in order to study or lecture. Expenses of both incoming and outgoing scholars are covered by the Turkish government. More information on Mevlana exchange program is available at <http://www.yok.gov.tr/web/mevlana>



## 17. Degree Equivalency

In line with the Lisbon Convention, the Regulation on Recognition of Foreign Higher Education Qualification was reviewed and the new version of the Regulation came into force first on May 11, 2007 and has been revised again on Nov 6, 2010. Since then, the new regulation with relevant changes has been applied in the procedure of recognition and the assessments of foreign higher education diplomas in Turkey.

The people who have associate (short cycle), bachelor (first cycle) and master's degrees (second cycle) diplomas given from the Higher Education Institutions outside Turkey must apply to the Council of Higher Education if they wish to get equivalence certificates. ([www.yok.gov.tr](http://www.yok.gov.tr))

Considering the equivalency of the degrees of professorship, associate professorship and doctorate, on the other hand, Inter-university Council is the responsible body and the people who have taken these degrees outside Turkey have to apply this Council in order to obtain equivalency. (<http://www.uak.gov.tr/>)

## 18. Institutional Cooperation

**Cooperation protocols** between a Turkish higher education institution and any higher education institution from other countries can be signed for all programs at all degrees (Associate/ Bachelor/ Master/ Doctorate). These kinds of protocols make possible short term student and academic staff exchanges and all kind of scientific cooperation between the parties. Recognition of the foreign higher education institution by CoHE is required to conclude the protocol. However, the content of protocols is under higher education institutions' consideration.

**Joint or Dual Degree Program Protocols** between a Turkish higher education institution and any higher education institution from other countries can be signed for all degrees (Associate /Bachelor/Master/ Doctorate). Recognition of the foreign higher education institution by CoHE is also obligatory to conclude the protocol. In addition, the content of protocol should be prepared in accordance with the regulations of the Council of Higher Education on joint programs. Programs are announced in the booklet of Measurement, Selection and Placement Center (ÖSYM) and websites. Students should fulfill requirements stated in the protocol. Each part determines their own tuition fee depending on the protocol and students should spend a given period of academic calendar in partner universities. Currently, there are nearly 200 joint/dual degree programs at different levels and for different programs between Turkish higher education institutions and higher education institutions all around the world.

## 19. Related Institutions

**The Ministry of National Education** is the national authority responsible for primary and secondary education and its institutions whereas the Council of Higher Education is responsible for higher education and its institutions. (<http://www.meb.gov.tr>)

**The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TÜBİTAK)** is the leading agency for management, funding and conduct of research in Turkey. It is responsible for promoting, developing, organizing, conducting and coordinating research and development in line with national targets and priorities. TÜBİTAK is an autonomous institution governed by a Scientific Board whose members are selected from among outstanding scholars from universities, industry and research institutions. In addition, it acts as an advisory agency to the Turkish Government on science and research issues. (<http://www.tubitak.gov.tr>)

**The Academy of Sciences of Turkey (TÜBA)** is an autonomous body which determines its organizational structure and activities on the principle of scientific merit. Its aims are to establish criteria for scientific excellence in Turkey, to encourage and foster scientific endeavors, to ensure that scientific principles are applied in all spheres and to create an environment of debate so that basic social strategies can be defined in the light of scientific and technological data. (<http://www.tuba.gov.tr>)

**The Turkish National Agency** of the Centre for European Union Education and Youth Programs was established under the Turkish Prime Ministry State Planning Organization in January 2002 and came under the administration of Ministry of European Union in July 2011. The main purpose of the Agency which coordinates the Erasmus + Programme in Turkey, is to promote mobility among the higher education institutions in Turkey and in Europe. (<http://www.ua.gov.tr>)

**Yunus Emre Institute** was established in 2009 to do research in order to promote and teach history, language and literature of Turkish culture, encourage scientific studies with the collaboration of different institutions and inform community about the results of these studies through various publications. Currently, more than 30 cultural centers are functioning around the world. These centers provide opportunity for those who want to learn Turkish as a foreign language. Reputed names in the field of culture and art meet with art-lovers in these centers through various seminars, symposiums, conferences and panels. (<http://yee.org.tr/turkiye/en/anasayfa>)

**The Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities** is a state institution managing Turkey's relations with Turkish citizens living in different parts of the world, kin communities with whom Turkish people share a common culture and also Türkiye-Scholarships students. The Presidency is responsible for coordinating services such as accommodation, Turkish language instruction, academic counseling, tuition fees, medical services,

monthly stipends, and round trip airline tickets for international Türkiye-Scholarships students. ([www.ytb.gov.tr/](http://www.ytb.gov.tr/))

## 20. Contact

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[www.yok.gov.tr/en/web/mevlana](http://www.yok.gov.tr/en/web/mevlana)

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