Overview of the Higher Education System

Tunisia
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Eurydice
The higher education system in Tunisia

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Legend:
- Most common length of a Bologna cycle
- Other length of a Bologna cycle
- Professional programme
- Programme outside the typical Bologna model
- Professional programme non Bologna
- ECTS: Credits according to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
- All programmes have admission requirements
- Regulated at national level
- Decided at institutional level
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1 Overview

Tunisia is situated on the Mediterranean coast of North Africa. It is the northernmost country in Africa, covering 165,000 square kilometres and having a coastline of 1,148 kilometres. It is bordered by Algeria on the west and Libya on the south east.

As of 2014, the total population is estimated at 11 million. It is made up of people of Arab, Berber, and Turkish descent.

Arabic is the official language; Tunisian Arabic is the national, vernacular variety of Arabic used by the public. French also plays a major role in the Tunisian society, despite having no official status. It is widely used in education, in the press and in business. Shop signs, menus and road signs in Tunisia are generally written in both Arabic and French.

The religion of the majority around (98%) of the Tunisian population is Islam, while about 2% follow Christianity or Judaism.

According to the World Bank, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2014 is equal to $48,61 billion and the GDP growth rate is estimated at 2.7%. Education is given a high priority and accounts for 7% of GDP.

1.1 Fundamental Principles and National Policies

Since its independence in 1956, the government of Tunisia has focused on developing an education system which produces a solid human capital base able to respond to the changing needs of a developing nation. The Constitution of the second republic adopted on 26 January 2014, has reaffirmed the importance of education by stating in Article 39 that “Education shall be mandatory up to the age of sixteen years. The state guarantees the right to free public education at all levels and ensures provisions of the necessary resources to achieve a high quality of education, teaching, and training”.

The Tunisian authorities decided to “move to the LMD system” (Bachelor, Master and Doctorate degrees) in September 2006 gradually up to the generalization of this model on the horizon of 2012. This decision posed broad objectives similar to the European approach: flexibility, international comparability, mobility, employability, gateways, progressive orientation, educational quality, professional, multidisciplinary approach.

1.2 Lifelong Learning Strategy

Since 1956, high priority was given to legislation, in the form of laws, programmes and mechanisms, translating an overall strategy conducive to Lifelong Learning.

- Commitment to LLL objectives can be seen in the following practical measures:
  - The obligation of education for children of both sexes between 6 and 16 (1991);
  - The revision of textbooks to fight stereotypes—mainly those presenting women as individuals confined to secondary roles and inferior status;
  - The introduction of themes relating to human rights in textbooks for basic and secondary education, thus allowing children to grasp the concept and its practice;

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1 Lifelong Learning: Sharing the Tunisian Experience R Najoua Essefi; in Integrating Lifelong Learning Perspectives, edited by Carolyn Medel-Áñonuevo; UNESCO Institute for Education
- Availability of radio programmes in six languages namely Arabic, French, English, Italian, Spanish and German;
- The implantation of foreign cultural centres in the major cities;
- The teaching of several foreign languages to facilitate Tunisian students' mobility;
- Providing the right to interrupt professional career to start research or continue studies;
- Improving technological competencies required in the workplace with the objective of bridging the gap with industrialized countries.

In line with the general national LLL concept, the Higher Education Law n° 2008-19 of February 25, 2008 stresses LLL as one of the main objectives of Higher Education in Tunisia. In fact, one of the fundamental missions of Higher Education, as stated in Article 2 of the law is to “provide classroom training, distance training, continuous training, alternating training and training on demand, and provide lifelong learning opportunities”.

LLL has also been stressed as one of the objectives of the Virtual University of Tunis (UVT), a public institution, established in January 2002, with the main mission of developing courses and university curricula in line with the standards of other Tunisian universities. UVT embraces the LLL principles as it has enriched the university training systems providing the possibilities of distance learning, offering more opportunities of continuous self-development to a wider audience. Since January 1st 2016 the UVT has acquired a new status as a public institution with scientific and technological character (EPST). The new status was decided by governmental decree n°2542-2015 dated 21 December 2015.

1.3 Organisation of Private Education

The private sector has been developing rapidly, as the number of private higher Education institutions has increased from 39 in 2010 to 63 fully private institutions in 2015.

In 2000, Tunisia established a legal framework for regulating the private higher education sector. In order to receive a license to operate, a private Higher Education Institution must submit an application providing information on: i) the firm’s legal status, ii) its owners and their share of the firm’s capital, iii) the director’s personal and professional standing (the director must be a Tunisian National and have a university degree), iv) the location and ownership status of land and buildings, v) equipment and library holdings, vi) the budget, vii) study programmes, viii) teaching staff.

1.4 National Qualifications Framework

The National Qualifications Framework was set by Decree n° 2009-2139 dated 8 July 2009 which fixed the national classification of qualifications. The framework was jointly elaborated by the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Professional Training and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research after consulting the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Agriculture and Hydraulic Resources, the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Public Health, the Ministry of Employment and the Administrative Court. The major lines of the National Qualifications Framework at the level of Higher Education are summarized in the following paragraph.

The public higher education in Tunisia remains accessible to anyone holding the certificate awarded on successful completion of secondary education (al-bakaluria). Holders of the bakaluria are directed in the

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choice of university and course by a computerised system which takes into account pupils’ merits, their wishes and the number of places available in each course.

As a result of the reform which has introduced the three cycle system (LMD), all the courses administered by Tunisian universities, with the exception of medical, architecture and engineering courses, are based on the structure of Bachelor degrees, awarded on accumulation of 180 credits, Master degrees, awarded after a further accumulation of 120 credits and Doctorates (180 credits).

Engineering students attend two years of preparatory classes, culminating in a national competitive examination and are then assigned to engineering schools (écoles d’ingénieurs) on the basis of their grades and wishes. Specialised training in the engineer school takes three years, bringing the total length of the engineering training to five years.

In medical subjects the number of places is limited to about 200 first-year students in each institution and studies last for five years, followed by one year of clinical training. Courses in paramedical subjects, i.e. health science and technology and nursing, have switched to the Bachelor, Master and Doctorate system.

There are no longer university courses in Tunisia shorter than the three-year Bachelor course. The process for teaching in universities (ataahil-el-jamii) involves the preparation of a research dossier by a lecturer seeking promotion to the grade of senior lecturer. The procedure is similar to that of a doctoral thesis defence. The lecturer defends the research dossier in front of a panel; if it is accepted, the candidate is eligible to enter the national competitive examination for the recruitment of senior lecturers.

### 1.5 Statistics on Organisation and Governance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of students (in academic year 2014/2015)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>322.625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>292.291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.334</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Higher Education Institutes (HEI) (in academic year 2014/2015)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 1.6 Distribution of responsibilities


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In Tunisia, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research bears the overall responsibility for developing and implementing higher education policy. The decisions of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research are taken after consultation with the Universities Council (Majlis al-Jamiat), which comprises the Presidents of all the country’s universities. The Universities Council is the national body responsible for ensuring that the sectorial broad strategic guidelines are applied. The task of that body is to validate the decisions of the sectorial committees and the national committee on the reform of the course structure, comprising professors from 25 different disciplines. It is also responsible for accrediting higher education institutions, thereby enabling them to award Bachelor, Master and Doctorate degrees and to habilitate teaching staff. The Universities Council is also entrusted with all other matters referred to it by the Minister of Higher Education.

It is possible to create programmes for the promotion of scientific research with a view to ensuring that the training required for the attainment of university degrees is delivered while monitoring their pursuit and their contribution to technological innovation. This is carried out in the framework of the broad guidelines for education and scientific-research policies. Although the strategic direction of the system of higher education is centralised, each university is free to define the ways in which it can implement the key national policy guidelines. An institution with a number of teaching staff in senior grades exceeding the minimum required by regulations and satisfying the set criteria is authorised to provide Master courses and to award the resulting degrees. The same applies to Doctorates.

In addition, the Higher Education Act (law n°2008-19) reforms university administration by offering institutions the option of moving from centralised management to a more flexible and autonomous form of management by establishing themselves as public academic and technological institutions (EPSTs), provided that they fulfil conditions relating primarily to the quality of their educational, academic, administrative and financial management.

The National Evaluation, Quality Assurance and Accreditation Authority (Decree n° 1719-2012 dated 14 September 2012) is in charge of ensuring the quality of higher education. Its aim is to contribute to maintaining and improving the quality of higher education and research as well as the compliance of the education system with internationally recognized standards.

2 Higher Education Funding

2.1 Public Education

The financing of higher education in Tunisia is under the mandate of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, which allocates funds directly to public higher education institutions and controls the spending of their respective funds. Public educational institutions are primarily funded from the state budget, while private educational institutions do not receive any direct or indirect public funding.

2.1.1 Financial Autonomy and Control

Institutions of higher education enjoy financial autonomy; they can generate their own resources by providing chargeable services. At the present time, universities are being asked to augment their own resources by becoming more open to the world of business. Their budgets are attached by order to the state budget. The financial resources of universities and higher education and research institutions consist of state subsidies, income from contracts for training and research, studies, expertise and other services, income from operations of goods or their disposal, income from tuition fees, subsidies from any other organization, donations and legacies. The grant awarded by the state is accounted in university budgets. The latter are responsible for its distribution among the higher education institutions which are subject to financial supervision. The expenditures of universities and institutions are of two types:
management expenses and development expenses. These expenses are necessarily subject to visa control of public expenditure in the manner of the provisional commitment within the limit of half of the appropriations.

2.1.2 Fees within Public Higher Education

The following rates refer to fees per year in the different cycles and subjects. The same fees apply to both national and international students:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>First cycle</th>
<th>Second Cycle (third year of Licence)</th>
<th>Master and Doctorate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Letters; Human, Islamic, Legal, Economic and Management sciences</td>
<td>30 TND (≈ 13,56 Euros)</td>
<td>40 TND (≈ 18 Euros)</td>
<td>100 TND (≈ 45,20 Euros)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pure Sciences</td>
<td>40 TND (≈ 18 Euros)</td>
<td>60 TND (≈ 27 Euros)</td>
<td>130 TND (≈ 58,16 Euros)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering Sciences, Technical Sciences; Medical Sciences, Agronomic Sciences, Architecture and Fine Arts</td>
<td>60 TND (≈ 27 Euros)</td>
<td>80 TND (≈ 36 Euros)</td>
<td>200 TND (≈ 90,38 Euros)</td>
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</table>

2.2 Private Education

The 63 private Higher Education Institutions do not receive any direct or indirect public funding. The main source of income for private higher education institutions are tuition fees. Private universities autonomously provide funds for their educational and scientific work. All students at private Higher Education Institutions are expected to pay tuition fees that are in general higher than those at public universities.

2.3 Financial Support for Learners' Families

There are no structural measures meant to target learners’ families. All of the existing support measures apply to students directly.

2.4 Financial Support for Learners

The government awards national grants to about a third of students, particularly to those from underprivileged sections of society. It also subsidizes the price of meals served in the university canteens for all students and pays subsidies to keep down the cost of rent in university halls of residence. Another form of financial support for students consists in loans allocated by the social security funds; students have to repay these loans after completing their studies. The Tunisian government awards scholarships for overseas study to the most deserving students on particular courses, such as certain engineering courses.

3 The structure of the Higher Education system

Higher education is accessible to every person who finishes a four-year secondary school and obtains the Baccalaureate or equivalent diploma.
Access to higher education has expanded in a substantial way, as the gross tertiary enrolment rate is 32% (less than 8% in 1990) and the number of students per 100,000 inhabitants exceeds 3,000 (less than 770 in 1990).

Tunisia started the reform of its higher education system by implementing the Bologna Process in 2006, followed by the adoption of the new Law on Higher Education in 2008. This law formally introduced the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), the three-cycle system of study and the diploma supplement.

As a result, from the academic year 2006/2007, the bachelor was generalised on three waves (2006 – 2007 - 2008) at all institutions. The first Masters under the LMD structure began in 2009, and the new PhD started from the academic year 2012-2013.

Higher education is organized in the framework of multidisciplinary universities (13 universities including 203 faculties, schools or higher institutes), and a network of 25 Higher Institutes of Technological Studies (HITS).

The private higher education system includes 63 institutions (2014-2015).

The higher education system in Tunisia has two types of studies: fundamental or academic studies, and applied or professional studies.

Higher education is divided into three levels:

**The first level** of studies includes:
- Academic (Fundamental) Bachelor– last for 3 years, carrying 180 ECTS
- Applied Bachelor– last for 3 years, carrying 180 ECTS.

**The second level** of studies includes:
- Academic Master– lasting for 2 years and carrying 120 ECTS for students who have previously achieved 180 ECTS
- Professional Master– lasting for 2 years and carrying 120 ECTS for students who have previously achieved 180 ECTS.

**The third level** of studies includes Doctoral academic studies (PhD), including a minimum of 3 years of research and courses and carrying 180 ECTS (150 ECTS for the thesis + 30 ECTS for doctoral courses).

The studies of engineering, architecture, medicine, pharmacy, dentistry and veterinary medicine are organized in accordance with the specific characteristics of these disciplines and in accordance with international standards.

Higher education institutions organize and implement study programmes within an academic year commencing in September and lasting 10 months.

### 3.1 Types of Higher Education Institutions

The public sector of higher education includes 13 universities (including the Virtual University) and a network of 25 higher technological studies institutes under the direct supervision of the Ministry of Higher Education (General Direction of Technological Studies DGET).
Each university is organised in **faculties**, **schools** and **higher institutes**. All universities award, through their components (faculties, schools or higher institutes), academic diplomas as well as applied diplomas. The higher technological studies institutes deliver only applied and professional diplomas.

Both Universities and higher technological studies institutes are public administrative institutions. They can be established as public scientific and technological institutions (PSTI) (more flexibility in management) if they meet the conditions set by decree n° 2008-3581 of November 21st 2008.

Some higher education and research institutions are under the co-supervision of the Ministry of Higher Education and other ministries such as Health, Agriculture or sports ministries.

The private higher education institutions are organised as limited companies (private law) under the supervision of the Ministry of Higher Education in accordance with national specifications set by law.

### 3.2 First Cycle Programmes

First cycle studies are offered by all types of higher education institutions in Tunisia. Every young Tunisian has the right to a seat at the university. A condition for entering a Bachelor study programme is the completion of four-year secondary education and the obtainment of the Baccalaureate or equivalent diploma.

A national university guidance system allows the holder of a Baccalaureate to choose his/her branch of study.

#### 3.2.1 Branches of Study

University education offers, in terms of Bachelor, are organized as applied or fundamental (basic) national diploma. The studies last three years after the baccalaureate and include 180 credits over six semesters. The semester includes at least 14 weeks of study and a number of 5 or 6 teaching units, representing 30 credits.

The decree No. 2008-3123 of 22 September 2008 establishes the general framework for the system of education and the conditions for obtaining a national Bachelor degree. The BA is at level 5 in the National Qualifications Frameworks (Decree No. 2009-2139 of 8 July 2009).

The applied Bachelor studies are developed on the basis of a balance between applied and theoretical components. They include theoretical courses, practical work and individual or group projects, a work-based learning through internships or, where appropriate, an alternation between higher education institutions and business. The obligatory internships carry at least 30 credits. Highly qualified holders of a Bachelor degree can enrol in a professional master and, to a lesser extent in the research master.

The fundamental (basic) Bachelor studies allow students to join the labour market.

The courses of fundamental Bachelor can be mono-disciplinary, bi-disciplinary or multidisciplinary. They include theoretical courses, seminars, tutorials, labs or work.

The main branches of higher education studies in Tunisia are:
- Basic science and technological studies
- Economic and Management Sciences
- Arts, education, tourism, journalism, sports and entertainment
• Law and legal sciences
• Languages, Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
• Medical and paramedical studies
• Agricultural sciences, biotechnology and environment

3.2.2 Admission Requirements

The completion of a secondary education programme (baccalaureate) is the general prerequisite for joining Bachelor other study programmes. The Tunisian baccalaureate includes seven specialties, each leading to specific branches of higher education studies:

• Mathematics
• Experimental Sciences
• Technology
• Economics
• Computer Science
• Literature
• Sports

A national university guidance system allows the holder of a Baccalaureate to choose his/her branch of study, depending on the type of baccalaureate obtained, his/her ranking and wishes.

Some institutions organize entrance exams that are usually held in early June and early July. The entrance exams involve specific programme studies whose list is fixed in the Academic Orientation Guide published annually by the Ministry of Higher Education. These include paramedical studies, music, theatre, sport, journalism.

The number of students to be enrolled in the first year of each study programme is determined in coordination between the Ministry of Higher Education and the higher education institutions.

3.2.3 Curriculum

Higher education institutions are autonomous in the creation of the contents of their respective educational curricula after permission of the competent authority.

The authorization to create a new specialty is granted by the Minister of Higher Education, in accordance with the following provisions:

• the habilitation project is presented by a higher education and research institution, after consulting the Scientific Council of the institution, the President of the university to which it belongs, and after deliberation by the University Council;
• the project is submitted to the Council of Universities for accreditation after its evaluation by the competent national sectorial committees;
• the habilitation is granted for a renewable period of 4 years.

The application for authorization of each course is presented according to a standard descriptive file.

The teaching units of each course are divided into two types: mandatory units and optional units:
The mandatory teaching units are followed by all students in a given course. They are fixed for each specialty or course in the framework of coordinating the training opportunities at national level. They comprise at least 75% of all units and credits of a course. They are subdivided into basic units and transverse units.

- The basic units are related to the specialty. They represent 3/4 of the total number of training hours and credits for compulsory units.
- Transverse units include additional training in areas such as information technology, entrepreneurial culture, human rights, English or other languages. They represent 1/4 of the total number of training hours and credits for compulsory units.

Optional units aim to deepen specialization or openness to other specialties or to facilitate the progressive orientation of the student and facilitate professional integration. Students choose these units from a list set by the university. They comprise about 25% of all teaching units and credits of a course.

Most subjects are taught in French and Arabic (the national languages). Few subjects are taught in English.

### 3.2.4 Teaching Methods

At the majority of HEIs in Tunisia, lectures are held for large groups of students. With the three cycles reform, and especially for applied courses, the general trend is to opt for small groups of students while integrating interactive methods and ICT tools.

There are no specific rules for first cycle studies regarding the teaching methods. Higher education teachers have to organize their lectures in compliance with the curriculum, but the teaching methods they should use are not prescribed. Teaching materials such as books and audio-visual materials are commonly used in the teaching process, but they are not always provided to students free of charge. Nevertheless, students are expected to refer to those materials when preparing their exams.

### 3.2.5 Progression of Students

The progress and the passage of the student in the various courses are based on the evaluation of teaching units, validation and capitalization.

The evaluation system has two modes:

- a mixed system joining the continuous assessment and end-semester exams with a single remedial session. It applies the following rates: 70% of the final exam and 30% of the continuous monitoring;
- a unique system based exclusively on the continuous assessment regarding a number of units. It applies the following rates: 80% of the in-class tests and 20% for other modes of tests (exercises, practical work, presentations).

The evaluation applied in the higher institutes of technological studies system is based exclusively on the continuous assessment.

The teaching unit and all its elements are capitalized by obtaining an average greater than or equal to 10 out of 20.
The evaluation is biannual, the passage is annual.

The student passes one year to another:
- by obtaining a score greater than or equal to 10 out of 20 in all course units in the relevant academic year;
- by achieving an annual average higher or equal to 10 out of 20 considering all units of the academic year.

Students pass the first year to the second year, or the second year to the third year, by the credit system, if s/he obtains 75% of the credits of the first year that is to say at least 45 credits.

3.2.6 Employability

The issue of employability of the graduates is the main challenge facing the higher education system in Tunisia. The university is called to undertake major restructuring at all levels, both in terms of training, research, governance and management structures and student life.

An agreement was signed between the Ministry of Higher Education and the employers' union (Tunisian Union of Industry, Trade and Crafts) in early 2005 and updated in 2014 to boost University - Business partnership.

The main measures undertaken to strengthen students’ employability are:
- the co-construction of applied bachelor programmes and professional masters (curricula designed and implemented in total partnership between professors and professionals);
- generalisation of transverse teaching units (languages, IT, entrepreneurial culture, soft skills, etc) to all bachelor programmes covering all subjects;
- obligatory internships and graduation projects (at least 30 credits) in all applied bachelor programmes and professional masters;
- the adoption of the national qualifications framework (Decree No. 2009-2139 of 8 July 2009 laying down the national classification of qualifications);
- the development of university-observatories network to improve the actions of prospecting for employability niches;
- the implementation of an action plan to develop entrepreneurial culture;
- encouraging skills certification with specific projects and programmes.

3.2.7 Student Assessment

The level of students is continually evaluated. The student can earn a maximum of 100 points by completing his/her pre-examination obligations and relevant exams. The ratio of points earned through pre-examination obligations and those earned at the exam is determined in the study programme. The minimum number of points that pre-examination obligations may carry is 30 and the maximum is 70 points out of the final 100. The student’s exam performance is expressed from grades 0 (failed) to 20 (excellent).

Higher education institutions may also establish other, non-numerical grading systems by relating the ratio of such marks to the one expressed through grades from 5 to 10.

The general act of a certain higher education institution includes precise regulations in terms of exam taking and grading procedures.
3.2.8 Certification

The authority responsible for certification is the Higher Education and Research Institution. Upon completion of the first level of higher education, the student receives a diploma with his/her relevant professional title, average grade and the number of ECTS earned. The student also receives a diploma supplement, which contains information regarding the level, type and content of the studies successfully finished.

3.3 Short-Cycle Higher Education

Short-cycle programmes no longer exist in the system of academic or professional studies in Tunisia.

3.4 Second Cycle Programmes

3.4.1 Branches of Study

The National Master's degree is awarded by the higher education and research institutions authorized to do so by the order of the Minister of Higher Education. The National Master's degrees in the LMD system are divided into professional masters and research masters. The master studies last 2 years and include 120 credits over four semesters. The semester includes at least 14 weeks.

In order to enrol in a Master programme, students must have completed a Bachelor programme with at least 180 ECTS. To complete a Master study programme, the student has to successfully write and defend a Master research dissertation or a final internship report for professional masters at the end of his/her studies.

3.4.2 Admission Requirements

The following categories of excellent students are allowed to enrol in Master programmes:
- holders of national bachelor degree in the "LMD" system in the course in relation to the relevant degree;
- holders of university diploma lasting more than three years after the baccalaureate.

The master's commission may exempt students with degrees awarded on academic training lasting more than three years from further courses and examinations related to the common units among the masters concerned and the diploma already held.

The dean or the director of the higher education institution fixes the number of open seats for registration in the master's degree according to the capacity available in the related higher education institute(s) after consulting the relevant Master's commission. At least 15% of the capacity should be reserved for applicants from other HEIs.

The dean or the director of the higher education institution concerned shall declare the admission for the registration in the national Master's degree, after the evaluation and ranking of the candidates' files by the Master's Committee in accordance with the set criteria which have been approved by the President of the university.
3.4.3 Curriculum

The habilitation to award master's programme is granted if the necessary guarantees relating, in particular, to the existing framework of teaching and supervision, quality of training content, participation of research organizations (laboratories and research units), as well as equipment and partnerships with the economic and social sector, are available at the higher education institution.

The duration of the authorization is four years, renewable upon completion of an evaluation carried out in accordance with the regulations.

The four semesters of the national master degree are as follows:
- three semesters devoted to acquiring an extensive knowledge about the various courses of the master programme and to deepening students' skills in the subject of specialization, in research methodologies, scientific documentation, and teaching;
- a semester devoted to the preparation of the research master's dissertation, or for professional master studies, to the realization of a final internship on a practical subject sanctioned by the preparation and defence of a report.
- The first three semesters of the National Master's degree include compulsory and optional teaching units as:
  - lectures, tutorials, integrated courses, seminars, practical work and courses, workshops, and personal work;
  - an internship in research structures, organisations, institutions or public or private companies, if necessary.

The languages of instruction are French and Arabic, but the institution may organize some courses in English or another foreign language. In fact, most programmes include an English module as a second foreign language.

3.4.4 Teaching Methods

Lectures are mostly conducted for large groups of students. As for first cycle studies, also for the second cycle studies there are no specific rules regarding the teaching methods. Higher education teachers have to organize their lectures in compliance with the curriculum, but the teaching methods they should use are not prescribed. Teaching materials such as books and audio-visual materials are commonly used in the teaching process but they are not always provided to students free of charge. Nevertheless, students are expected to refer to those materials when preparing their exams.

3.4.5 Progression of Students

The progression of Master students follows the same pattern as for the Bachelor studies. For more information, please consult § 3.2.5.

The evaluation at national Master's degree in the first three semesters is based on a mixed system joining the continuous assessment and end-semester exams with a single remediation session. In establishing regimes for specific examinations for each master's degree, are to be considered general educational principles of higher education in particular relating to the capitalization of teaching units successfully passed, the benefit of the better of the two grades obtained between the two examination sessions and compensation of marks obtained in the different units of the same year. The principle of compensation marks is not considered between the marks obtained in the teaching units of the third semester and the marks of professional or research master dissertation.
The defence of the Master’s dissertation takes place publicly before a panel of three members, including the supervisor (university coach and professional if any), appointed by the President of the Masters Committee.

3.4.6 Employability

This part is the same as for the Bachelor studies. For more information, please see section 3.2.6.

3.4.7 Student Assessment

This part is the same as for the Bachelor studies. For more information, please consult section 3.2.7.

3.4.8 Certification

The student who has completed a given specialty and obtained the corresponding credits, is awarded the national (professional or research) master diploma, the transcript and a diploma supplement providing descriptive information on the knowledge and skills acquired by students during the period of training.

The National Master degree indicates the field of training and the specialty, the average grade obtained in the four semesters, the number of credits and the specific ranking.

3.5 Programmes outside the Bachelor and Master Structure

The studies of engineering, architecture, medicine, pharmacy, dentistry and veterinary medicine are organized in accordance with the specific characteristics of these studies and in accordance with international standards.

- National engineering diploma: lasting for 5 years (2 preparatory years + 3 years of specialization at National schools of engineering)
- National diploma of architecture lasting for 6 years (2+4).
- National diploma of doctor in medicine: lasting for 8 years at least (11 years max)
- National diploma of doctor in veterinary medicine lasting for 7 years
- National diploma of doctor in pharmacy lasting for 6 years
- National diploma of doctor in dentistry medicine lasting for 6 years.

3.6 Third Cycle (PhD) Programmes

3.6.1 Organisation of Doctoral Studies

Doctoral studies (PhD) are organized according to the provisions of Decree No. 2013-47 of 4 January 2013. Doctoral studies (PhD) are organized at universities and last for three years (180 ECTS). To enrol in doctoral studies, the student must have completed a Research Master programme and obtained at least 300 ECTS during his/her previous studies. PhD studies involve extensive scientific research and publication of papers in scientific journals. A PhD thesis is the final part of the doctoral study programme.

During their training course, doctoral students attend additional courses in the form of training and research activities, seminars and internships. During the years of doctoral studies, the student must obtain validation of complementary courses group including thirty (30) credits of the total of one hundred eighty (180) credits.
3.6.2 Admission Requirements

Candidates are allowed to apply for doctoral studies if they have the following diplomas:

- National Research Master's degree in the "LMD" system;
- National Master’s degree (Old system);

The holder of any of the following degrees is also allowed to apply for doctoral studies: Aggregation, National Engineering Diploma, National diploma in architecture, National diploma of doctor of medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine and pharmacy.

Doctoral boards provide the study of applications and verification of skills for further research, according to the criteria established by the doctoral committees following a general guidance fixed by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research.

The applicant for enrolment in doctoral studies must obtain the prior agreement of a teacher to supervise his/her doctoral theses and the validation of the thesis’s subject by the doctoral Committee.

3.6.3 Status of Doctoral Students/Candidates

Both employed and unemployed students have equal rights in terms of eligibility for any particular programme as long as they meet all other preconditions.

Unemployed students are entitled to all benefits and rights as those granted at the previous levels of study (health insurance, student subsidies for meals, public transport and scholarships).

3.6.4 Supervision Arrangements

In order to organize PhD study programmes, the higher education institution has to observe the specific selection criteria applicable to PhD teaching staff.

Doctoral commissions or group of references are created within each institution authorized to confer a doctoral degree. These commissions work in coordination with relevant doctoral schools. Each doctoral commission consists of teachers qualified to direct doctoral theses and belonging to the authorized institutions.

Teachers in higher education, senior lecturers, professors and those with an equivalent grade are authorized to supervise doctoral theses, each in their specialty.

A PhD mentor can have a limited number of students under their supervision at a time. This number is fixed by the university council. A thesis charter must be signed by the student and his/her mentor.

3.6.5 Employability

The national doctoral degree empowers those who are holders of a PhD to exercise all professions which correspond to the seventh level of the national classification of qualifications according to Decree No. 2009-2139 of July 8, 2009.
Students are assessed on the basis of their overall performance and engagement, as well as on the basis of credits earned through their exams. The PhD thesis, being the final part of the studies, is assessed on the basis of its scientific or artistic significance and contribution to the field in question. It represents an independent scientific research work. Each higher education institution sets its general rules of application procedure and PhD thesis defence, which apply to all of its constituent departments. To obtain a defence authorization, the thesis is submitted to a review process by two independent reviewers. In case their reports are favourable, the doctoral committee submits a jury proposal to the President of the University for approval.

Once the students have completed all of their examination obligations and defended their PhD thesis, they receive a diploma stating their official title. The national doctoral degree is issued by the dean or director of the institution concerned on the recommendation of the jury of the thesis defence.

The basic required degree is a doctorate for an associate professor grade, doctorate and university habilitation (UH equivalent to HDR) for senior lecturers and professors. Holders of a research Master degree can be recruited as assistant professors if they are in preparation of a Doctorate. The duration of initial education for academic staff is usually 8-9 years (3 years for a Bachelor degree programme + 2 years for a Master degree programme, or engineering degree (2+3 years) + 3-4 years for a PhD degree programme).

Until the eighties, when the Tunisian universities had been just established, teachers obtained their doctorate degrees from foreign universities, essentially in western countries. With the development of a national research structures, in the nineties, and the resulting expansion of post graduate studies in different Tunisian universities, the number of young teachers has increased in different fields. During their doctorate preparation, almost all doctoral students benefit from training by a doctoral school, improving their soft and scientific skills. Annually each university organizes a series of pedagogic training addressed to new employed teachers, provided by a specialist (duration: 2-4 days). The pedagogic training is funded and managed by the university. Other more specific trainings could be made available to teachers as those provided by Tempus/Capacity Building in Higher Education (Erasmus+) projects.

There exists a legal framework which regulates the working time and duties of all the academic staff. The teaching departments, institution and university structures are responsible for applying this regulation. Mobility between different institutions and universities is possible, but it depends on some criteria of local and national order. Teachers obey to general regulations and law concerning public service. In order to get their retirement, professors need to complete no less than 35 active years and to reach the age of 60 in case of assistant and associate professors (B grade teachers, “Assistant et Maitre Assistant”) or the age of 65 for senior lecturers and professors (A grade teachers, “Maitre de Conférences et Professeur”).
4.2.1 Planning Policy

With the increasing number of students, the official policy has been oriented to respond to the highly growing needs of the academic staff of the new created HEIs in different Tunisian regions. This challenge has been overcome by intensive contractual recruitment. For the academic year 2006/2007, out of the 11,612 total teachers (43.7% are women) 51% were permanent professors with at least a doctorate degree, 17% contractual and 1.65% non-Tunisian teachers. For the academic year 2014/2015, the number of teachers reached 22,561, 54% of whom are permanent with at least a doctorate degree.

Policy makers target improvement in teachers’ ratios essentially in some fields where there is a lack of human resources. The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research develops annual statistics concerning students and academic staff. Synthetic annual reports are published by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. Along the statistics results, the Ministry decides whether there is a need to provide larger human resources.

4.2.2 Entry to the Profession

Academic staff in higher education is recruited through a national annual competition exam organized by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. The commissions of the recruitment panel for each speciality and each grade are composed of elected and appointed members. These commissions are the bodies responsible for recruitment competitions and they operate autonomously.

The General Direction of Higher Education at the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research manages the competition administrative process. Universities receive applications, but they are not involved in the centralised competition process; they only manage the contractual status of teachers once recruited.

For newly recruited teachers, the decision for permanent appointment depends from the scientific council at the home institution. The evolution of the teachers’ career is judged by peers through competition run by national commissions.

4.2.3 Professional Status

Academic staff in public HEIs has the status of civil servants and is appointed in accordance with the specific legislation specifying the professional duties, recruitment procedures and salaries. Therefore they obey to common legislation of public servants and abide by the general code of professional ethics of civil servants. The status of teachers and researchers gives academic staff a higher degree of freedom in their job, compared to the administrative staff.

Academic staff of universities is divided into 4 grades:

- An assistant is recruited on the basis of a defended Master dissertation and the current preparation of a Doctorate. Assistants provide practical works (PW) and/or tutorial classes (TC) (weekly teaching service: 15 hours of PW equivalent to 11 hours of TC)
- An associate professor is recruited on the basis of a defended doctoral thesis. He/she provides practical works, tutorial classes and lectures. He/she helps professors and senior lecturers in teaching and exams organisation. Associate professors can also contribute to PhD students’ supervision (weekly teaching service: 14 hours of WP equivalent to 9.5 hours of TC)
- A senior lecturer is recruited on the basis of a habilitation dossier. He/she provides lectures and doctorate supervision (weekly teaching service: 5.5 hours of lecture class)
• A university professor is recruited on the basis of a dossier containing elements of scientific research, supervision and pedagogical productions involving at least 4 years work as a senior lecturer. The professor provides lectures, doctorate supervision (weekly teaching service: 5.5 hours of lecture class)

4.2.4 Salaries

Teachers’ salaries in higher education are uniformly fixed by common legislation in public HEIs. The salary value depends on the teachers’ grade and seniority and is well established by legislative norms. Higher-ranking title brings a salary increase. When a teacher is responsible for an additional administrative function at the university, he/she receives a specific indemnity in addition to his teaching salary (e.g. becoming Head of Department, Dean, Rector, etc.). The ratio between the highest and lowest grade salaries is about two. Furthermore, as it is specified by the public service labour law, each year of working experience leads to an increase in salary and an additional number of annual holidays.

4.2.5 Working Time and Holidays

Along the academic year (28 to 30 weeks), a fixed weekly number of teaching hours is required depending mainly on teachers’ grades. The department and concerned institution structures (Direction des Etudes) determine the structure and schedule of teachers’ annual and weekly professional obligations.

The framework law governing the HE considers research activity as an “element closely linked to teaching” (art. 31, Law n° 2008-19 of February 25th, 2008). The legal status of academic staff defining them as research professor, considers research activities, as teaching duties, being part of their mission. They are called to actively participate in the organization and running of pedagogical activities (exams, student mentoring, pedagogical method improvements, etc.) and in recruitment and promotion peers’ commissions.

When academic staff has no administrative charges, they enjoy holidays the way students do (two weeks winter holidays, two weeks spring holidays, and two months summer holidays).

4.2.6 Promotion, Advancement

For the academic staff, promotion (from assistant to professor) is considered career advancement. Although the academic staff members have to formally undergo recruitment process in order to earn a higher title, promotion is an expected sequence of events for those who wish to continue their career at the same institution.

Honourable professor emeritus title may be granted to a retired professor for his/her distinguished scientific work and contribution to higher education. Professors emeritus may be involved in all teaching activities within the second and third degree levels of study.

4.2.7 Retirement and Pensions

Teachers may retire at the age of 65 for senior lecturer and professor grades provided that they have a minimum of 35 years of work in order to benefit from full retirement pensions. Assistant and associate professors retire at the age of 60 with a minimum of 35 professional years. In some particular cases, teachers who achieve retirement term could have the right to extend their employment for a period up to 3 years, under certain conditions and with the support of their institution.
A very small percentage of teachers can get promoted to professor emeritus.

Pensions are determined by the common Law on Pension and Disability Insurance.

4.3 Continuing Professional Development for Academic Staff Working in Higher Education

4.3.1 Organisational Aspects

The professional development of the academic staff is, in most cases, based on their scientific work. It is generally an individual choice, boosted by scientific interest, material incentive and career progress aspirations. There are no requirements determined by the law regarding professional development on this level, which is, therefore, most commonly a matter of choice. However, professional development in the form of published scientific papers and other relevant means is extremely important for career promotion and teachers’ employment.

Professional development can be organized in the forms of specialization, work towards a higher level of formal education, symposia, courses, study theses, congresses, seminars, conferences and similar activities. Institutions are required to provide favourable conditions for the professional development of their staff, including the time required for the completion of such engagement within regular working hours.

4.3.2 Incentives for Participation in Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Activities

The amount of time spent on professional development is part of the working time and the institution is responsible for covering all expenses incurred in the process. A certain number of working days are used up for professional development, through research and participation in various professional improvement activities (research work and participation in conferences and other important academic events). In general, these activities are supported by funds provided by concerned research structures, of which the teacher is member, and could be supported by the institution, if its budget allows so. The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research approves funds for research work and science development, for which academic staff may apply. Young researchers who recently joined the academic community (PhD students, assistants and associate professors) are given the priority to be granted financial support.

After 5 years of employment, the institution may approve one year of paid absence (sabbatical year) for the teachers’ professional development and scientific research purposes especially in the case of participation in scientific projects and preparation of PhD or specialization thesis.

5 Management and Other Education Staff for Higher Education

5.1 Requirements for Appointment

According to the Law n° 2008-19 of 2008 on Higher Education, the national priorities in terms of education and research are fixed by the state represented by the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research. The managing body of higher education institution is the Universities Council, which comprises the Presidents of all national universities and managing directors of the Central Administration of the Ministry and is chaired by the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research.

At the central level, the decisions of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research are taken after consultation with the Universities Council.
The president of university is the executive managing body of the university; the dean has the same function at the faculty level and the director at higher institutes and schools level. These positions are granted to elected full time professors already working in these institutions. The president of university, the dean and the director are elected for a three-year term renewable only once. The president of university is elected by the council of the university of which the professor is a member and the dean or director by the scientific council of the institution to which he/she belongs. The council of the university is composed of elected teachers, of elected students as well as of representatives of the economic and social environment. Each university has a university council, which examines matters relating to:

- the definition of the university programmes in the spheres of training, research and inter-university cooperation;
- the organization of the university life and the establishment of appropriate methods to improve the academic and educational output of the institutes under the responsibility of the university;
- all other questions referred to it by the president of the university or the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research.

Under the same conditions and requirements, vice-presidents of university, vice-deans and vice-directors support the work of presidents/deans/directors, as members of the executive managing bodies. Vice-presidents of universities and vice-deans are full time professors. Vice-presidents are also elected by the university council, while vice-deans and vice-directors are proposed by deans and directors after consulting the appropriate scientific council at their respective institutes.

Departments in every institute are under the authority of elected heads of department and directors of studies and/or practical courses. The departmental governing body includes elected staff and students’ representatives.

5.2 Conditions of Service

Presidents of universities, vice presidents, deans, vice deans, directors and vice directors of institutes are responsible for administering and/or managing higher education institutions and they are full-time employees. In addition to their initial salary, they receive an additional monthly allowance of about 20% of the value of their salaries. Nobody can apply for any of these managing positions if he/she was subject to a disciplinary measure during the previous five years. They are dismissed from their function in case of a serious error or if they fail to efficiently execute the duties required.

6 Quality Assurance in Higher Education

6.1 Responsible Bodies

The legal framework of quality assurance was recently revised and legal texts were created with two new essential notions, the quality assurance in the higher education institutions (law n° 2008-19 of February 25th, 2008) and the national frame of qualification - CNQ (decree n° 2139 of July 8th, 2009).

According to the mentioned law on higher education, the National Evaluation, Quality Assurance and Accreditation Authority (hereafter, NEQAAA) is the body responsible for quality assurance and improvement in higher education. It consists of 13 members (decree n°2012-1719 of 14 September on Higher Education): eight professors of higher education in the various scientific specialties selected after a call for candidacy. These are chosen on the basis of their skills, their scientific and academic position as well as their knowledge of the field of quality in higher education. In addition, the NEQAAA includes 4 representatives of the economic and social environment, among whom a representative of the private
higher education sector, and a specialist in administrative and financial management. The aim of the national authority is to contribute to the maintenance and the improvement of the quality in higher education as well as the compliance of the education system with internationally recognized standards. The NEQAAA’s main missions are:

- The institution of a quality system and of a guide of procedures appropriate to the authority;
- The approval of the methodology and the procedures of quality assurance;
- The elaboration and the adoption of a code of ethics;
- The accreditation of the experts assessors on proposal of the technical departments of the authority on the basis of calls to candidacy;
- The implementation of a programme of evaluation and accreditation in compliance with the priorities fixed by the Ministry for Higher Education and Scientific Research and with the requests of accreditation of the institutions of higher education and research;
- The implementation of a follow-up system of the procedures adopted by the universities and institutions of higher education and research in view of appraisal reports and of accreditation;
- The definition of self-evaluation standards;
- The formulation of external quality assurance standards and procedures;
- The definition of standards for accreditation of academic programmes and higher education institutions in order to guarantee the quality and the recognition of the national diplomas,
- The formulation of an international policy of cooperation in coordination with the regulatory authority;
- The NEQAAA submits an annual report on the realized activities of evaluation to the Head of government.

6.2 Approaches and Methods for Quality Assurance

The NEQAAA is in charge of the external evaluation and focuses on the external quality assurance procedures on teaching, internal quality assurance and management systems, research, support services to students, library and IT resources, space and equipment, non-teaching staff, management and transparency, lifelong learning provisions and employability of graduates. In order to fulfill these tasks, experts in the fields of curricula, education, and higher education assessment are trained. More than 120 experts (2011-2015) benefited from training in quality review through the organization of training courses, planned visits to quality assurance agencies within the framework of the EU educational programmes and through the organization of workshops dedicated to the exchange of experiences and best practices in the fields of quality assessment with Arab, American and British partners. The panel of experts gathers representatives of all the scientific disciplines and other stakeholders.

The accreditation at the institutional level includes a review of the programmes proposed, the educational and scientific methods which are applied and their compliance with the quality of the delivered diplomas, as well as the skills and the capacities expected from the graduates. The accreditation is granted for a maximal period of four years, either for the institution, for the programmes or for the courses. In case there is a negligence of the quality standards during the aforementioned period, the NEQAAA is legally able to withdraw the granted accreditation. Once obtained, the accreditation allows the concerned institution to benefit from additional credits, permitting to face the requirements which imply its commitment to respect the quality standards.

The internal quality assurance of academic programmes, teaching and learning, research, student’s services, general managements and work conditions is carried out by the higher education institutes under the supervision of the committee responsible for quality as defined by the Law n° 2008-19 of 25th February 2008 on Higher Education. In each higher education institution this committee is in charge of the elaboration of internal assessment reports, the monitoring of the established programmes, in particular

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those related to quality, and the formulation of proposals regarding quality enhancement. Its composition and its operating procedures are fixed by decision of President of the university after consultation of the scientific council of the institution. The committee responsible for quality to every university consists of the vice-president of the university, the presidents of the quality committees in the subordinate higher education institutes and three representatives of the economic and social environment. The committee for quality meets at least once every two months, following the demand of its president.

Self-evaluation takes place each year. Students’ assessment of the academic programmes quality is a part of the quality assurance procedure.

Universities and higher education institutes submit annual reports of internal evaluation to the Ministry for Higher Education and to the NEQAAA.

7 Educational Support and Guidance

Career guidance is provided by universities, faculty career development centres and the Ministry of Vocational Training and Employment. Most universities have professional and skills certification centres which organize workshops, provide counselling and offer internships.

7.1 Support Measures for Learners in Higher Education

7.1.1 Definition of the Target Group(s)

The Tunisian Constitution guarantees the right to free access to education to all the Tunisian students. Disadvantaged students, either because of physical disabilities or socio-economic handicaps benefit from a particular treatment. The identification of students in need is in the responsibility of local authorities in collaboration with the services of the Ministry of Social Affairs. The criteria used to identify these students include family income, the number of financially depending children, the opinion of the social counsellor, medical student records, etc. Families can benefit from occasional or regular support as a monthly grant. Students with disabilities are granted free adequate facilities provided by the state, associations and donations.

7.1.2 Specific Support Measures

Special measures are taken to help disadvantaged learners. Disabled students or those with health problems benefit from specific treatments depending on the nature of their disability. Students who cannot continue the academic year because of health problems and complications are eligible for enrolment deferral. The university budget includes financial assistance dedicated to students in need (purchase of eyeglasses, school supplies, etc.). They can benefit from special documents in case of severe sight problem, extra time for exams, and review their referral to more appropriate channels so that they are not obliged to interrupt their studies. In addition, students in need receive scholarships to continue their studies and are exempt from registration fees in institutions.

All the students are assured (disease, accidents, etc.) and have free of charge access to all public hospitals. The Tunisian government awards scholarships to study abroad to the most deserving students of targeted fields, such as engineering.
7.2 Guidance and Counselling in Higher Education

7.2.1 Academic Guidance

Institutions of higher education have undertaken a series of measures for providing a better guidance to students. Each institution has an information cell and guiding students in addition to the contribution of the directors of the various departments. Universities contribute to this effort. Master students have a series of courses and lectures presented by specialists. Schools of engineering and medical training are the forerunners in this field. Higher education institutions multiply the initiatives to improve student performance and provide at least one seminar a year in collaboration with external labour and business communities.

7.2.2 Psychological Counselling

Universities recruit psychologists who work within the institutions and provide assistance to students in order to help them overcome problems and thus improve their performance. Moreover, in each institution there is a listening cell which is required to assist students and facilitate their academic life at the institute. Special attention is reserved for students in difficulty.

7.2.3 Career Guidance

To improve the employability of the graduates and develop a culture of creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research has created centres of career and certification of skills. Each university and institute of higher technological education has a career and skills certification centre, (26 centres in total). The key role of these centres is to establish links and interaction between the university and the economic environment in order to develop students’ skills improve their employability and enhance the culture of initiative among young students. By 2020, there will be a centre in each higher education institute.

The centre provides the following services:

- Assist jobseekers and internships’ seekers, both students and graduates, to find opportunities and organise activities related to improving non-technical skills such as communication, team work, etc.
- Make available to employers training opportunities and facilitate the contact between job seekers and employers
- Provide graduates with training opportunities
- Provide employers and professionals with opportunities of training and lifelong learning
- Coordinate with organizations and associations that offer certifications of competence and schedule training sessions in order to enable trainees of an adequate certification
- Assist students of secondary education to choose their courses of training and professional.

The centre director develops an annual evaluation report on the activities carried out and forwards it to the President of the University who will submit it to the Minister of Higher Education.

8 Mobility and internalization in Higher Education

Before 2010, the government had focused mainly on integrating the big number of students in higher education. Since 2010, the decrease in the students’ number has changed the strategy of policy makers. The focus has been directed towards quality and competitiveness at national and international level. The
national reform project developed after the revolution considers students at the centre of the higher education system which has been prioritising accreditation and internationalisation. In this context, the consolidation of students’ mobility is one of the specific objectives. Different schemes provide international mobility opportunities for students and staff whether the national funding of the Ministry of Higher Education or the international support offered by European and bilateral projects.

The General Directorate of International Cooperation at the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research is in charge of establishing bilateral cooperation agreements on research and students and staff’s mobility with different countries in Europe and elsewhere.

Almost all higher education institutions in Tunisia have established bilateral and multilateral cooperation with similar universities in EU countries, Maghreb region, Arab countries, USA, Canada, Asia and other regions of the world. This cooperation focuses mainly on students’ mobility, study visits, exchange of teaching staff and research activities.

The Tunisian higher education institutions have participated in a significant number of Erasmus Mundus, Tempus Erasmus+ projects (137 projects in the period 2008-2015). These projects have reinforced the exchange networks between institutions of higher education in the southern Mediterranean countries and the EU. In fact, the thirteen public Tunisian universities are active and increasingly cooperating with partners in Europe other regions in the world.

The General Directorate of International Cooperation launches annually a considerable number of calls for applications to scholarship offers from different countries mostly in the framework of bilateral conventions. These calls concern both students and staff and include opportunities of short-term trainings or full-programme scholarships.

It is worth underlining the absence of a central body at the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research managing and following-up students’ mobility. Universities, faculties, engineering schools and different HE institutes manage students’ and staff mobility, in general the authorization of the university president is necessary.

Access to mobility statistics should be easier at the level of universities. At the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, data are available only for mobility funded and supported by programmes managed and coordinated by the Ministry. Despite the diversity of stakeholders, resources and support programmes (Erasmus+, AUF, DAAD, British Council, etc.) the internationalization and visibility of the Tunisian HEIs are limited because of the lack of a central agency or an institutional body in charge of the global follow-up.

8.1 Student Mobility

Mobility concerns all three levels of studies: bachelor, master and doctorate. There are different types of mobility:

- Simple study mobility: concerns bachelor and master students who spend one semester or one year in a European university. These scholarships are granted within the framework of a mutual agreement between the institution of origin and the host institution on issues such as the recognition of the applicant’s level and the validation of the modules and exams completed abroad. (framed and supported mainly by European projects).
• In addition, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research offers each year a certain number of master degree scholarships (for one or two years) for the benefit of selected students. These scholarships concern some European countries and Canada.

• End of studies project for engineering students (Projet de fin d’études ‘PFE’). In general this mobility concerns only the realization of the ‘PFE’ at the end of the engineering programme studies. The evaluation of the project occurs at home institution. Most of these scholarships are funded by national specific program managed and run by the Ministry of Higher Education.

• Joint degree mobility at the Bachelor and Master levels. This type of scholarship is still very limited because of the difficulties in credits transfers, ECTS validation and programmes’ adequacy (framed and supported mainly by European projects and, to a lesser extent, supported by national programmes).

• Training mobility scholarships: these target mostly doctoral students who are conducting research in research structures and laboratories in Europe and elsewhere. These scholarships are funded by national and international means with low involvement of European programs.

• Co-tutorship for doctoral studies: some doctoral students benefit of a co-tutorship agreement between their home universities and a hosting university. The students spend in an alternative way one semester in each of the two universities during the three years of doctoral studies. At the end of their studies, students obtain a double doctoral degrees or a joint doctoral degree depending on the terms of the prior agreement. The necessary mobility in this context commits doctorate supervisors to look for funding from different resources. Own resources of home research structure, bilateral agreements’ support or national specific programs funded by HERSM (‘bourse en alternance’) are the main supports for this kind of mobility.

The Tunisian HEIs institutions are highly committed to enhance their capacities to ensure best possible offers of mobility to their students at different levels. Students are increasingly seeking mobility opportunities at all levels of their studies, especially in neighbouring European countries. The European projects and the resulting networking play a real driving force in the mobility of students in spite of the existence of some technical issues such as degrees’ recognition and programmes’ accreditation.

8.2 Academic Staff Mobility

Tunisia had part of a higher education reform project supported by the European programme PAMES (‘Programme d’Appui à la Modernisation de l’Enseignement Supérieur en Tunisie’, governmental agreement with EU signed in 2004). The project supported the Tunisian Ministry to move to the LMD system and followed its implementation in the Tunisian HEIs. Besides, the reform process of the Tunisian higher education system was supported by the World Bank funded Programme PAQ (‘Programme d’Appui à la Qualité’: Education Quality Improvement Programme (EQIP) Project’s); the programme, which covered the period 2000-2014,touched various levels of higher education. These reform projects aimed at reinforcing governance, capacity building, structural changes and infrastructures. They also offered an important number of mobility opportunities for the academic staff, the administrative staff and those with leading responsibilities.

Improving the pedagogic skills of HE teachers and researchers as well as innovating the whole system are among the principal targets of the recent national reform project. Of course, this induces setting a strategy taking into account the centrality of the mobility of the academic staff in the reform.

Teachers from different universities benefit from mobility scholarships offered within the framework of Erasmus Mundus projects. Otherwise, the major research mobility for teachers is supported by public funding of research and by institutions’ budget. In addition, the academic staff benefit from mobility offers
granted by bilateral programmes especially in the field of research. A few professors get also the opportunity for teaching in European HEIs during limited periods.

Higher education teachers’ career development depends a lot on their scientific production. For this reason, they are essentially motivated by mobility offers that facilitate their scientific work and research. The academic staff’s mobility requires a prior authorization from the dean of the institutes, the president of the university or the minister, depending on the duration of the scholarship. If the teacher gets the authorisation, is allowed to receive his/her usual salary for the period spent abroad.

In general, the stay varies from two weeks to three months. We note that teachers orient themselves more towards structures and host institutions they have previous relations or connections with.

As for students, disparity in supporting bodies makes it difficult to elaborate exhaustive statistics for global academic staff mobility toward foreign universities. However, based on the authorization process, institutions could retrieve a certain number of information on teachers’ and researchers’ mobility.

As far as administrative international mobility is concerned, it is still very low compared to academic staff. Almost the only framework offering mobility opportunity for administrative staffs are the European projects, essentially those destined to capacity building or structural reforms.

### 8.3 Other Dimensions of Internationalisation in Higher Education

#### 8.3.1 European, Global and Intercultural Dimension in Curriculum Development

Following the Tunisian curriculum, foreign languages (French and English) are taught at an early stage of the primary level. Other foreign languages (German, Italian or Spanish) are taught at the secondary school as optional third foreign languages. The Tunisian educational system puts much emphasis on learning foreign languages. Each of the Tunisian universities has at least one institute specialized in foreign languages studies. Different national programmes and regional actions, involving HEI specialised in languages, are intended to offer courses for the public. These involve LLL activities and evening courses meant to teach and improve foreign languages for pupils, students, employers, young and old peoples, etc. For instance, Bourguiba School (IBLV: *Institut Bourguiba des langues vivantes*), is a public institute which belongs to the university of Tunis El Manar and has a network of 24 regional centres ensuring different levels of foreign languages teaching (essentially English).

The study programmes available along the various departments include language studies, cultural studies, literature studies, and joint degrees established in the framework of Tempus and Erasmus+ programmes.

#### 8.3.2 Partnerships and Networks

Several Tunisian institutions have agreements with educational institutions abroad which enable Tunisian students to get a double degree. Most agreements were initiated by engineering schools. Scholarships are granted to students by the General Directorate of International Cooperation of the Ministry of Higher Education to enable them to continue their studies in institutions abroad.

### 8.4 Bilateral Agreements and Worldwide Cooperation

The General Directorate of International Cooperation at the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research establishes and manages all bilateral agreements with partner countries and foreign
organisms. Currently, there are 44 bilateral agreements as reported by the official statistics of the General Directorate of International Cooperation on December 3, 2015. According to these statistics, the bilateral agreements are categorized as follows: 17 with Arab countries, 15 with European countries, 8 with Asian countries and 4 with American countries. The main elements of these agreements refer to cooperation in the area of higher education, research, innovation and technology, foreign students’ exchange and other activities of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. In addition to higher education, some of these agreements also relate to culture, languages, secondary and primary education.

### 8.4.1 Bilateral Agreements

Regionally, Tunisia has a solid cooperation in higher education and scientific research with neighbouring Maghreb countries. Tunisia has had an intensive programme for students exchange with Morocco for many years. This bilateral cooperation is expected to intensify during the coming years thanks to a new mobility programme. (Tunisian-Morocco “Ibn Khaldun” programme of mobility between the Tunisian and the Moroccan HEIs). In addition, Tunisia is a partner with Algeria in Tempus/Erasmus+ programmes (joint degrees, mobility for academic, research and administrative staff, credit transfers). A new specific program for student mobility between Tunisia and Algeria is currently being developed.

Tunisia is also building new cooperation opportunities with Southern and African countries. The Tunisian Ministry is encouraging African students to study at Tunisian HEIs.

In addition, there exist a number of international programmes in which Tunisia is involved. Tunisian-American programmes which offer degree and non-degree scholarships for master and doctorate students, researchers and academic staff. These programmes include “Partnership for the Enhanced Engagement in Research (PEER)”, “Fulbright”, “Fulbright Tech+” and “Thomas Jefferson”. Tunisia also participates in a number of bilateral programmes with Canada and Japan.

### 8.4.2 Cooperation and Participation in Worldwide Programmes and Organisations

Apart from European cooperation programmes, the General Directorate of International Cooperation disseminates a number of scholarship offers granted by international and regional organizations such as the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the World Bank (Joint Japan/WB scholarships and Robert S. McNamara Fellowship Program), UNESCO, Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF), Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD), African Bank.

Generally these calls concern scholarships for teachers and PhD or Master students and are limited to rese

### 9 On-going reforms and Policy developments

#### 9.1 Overall national education strategy and key objectives

The Strategic Reform Plan of 2025 reflects a national strategy which seeks to enhance the higher education sectors.

The Strategic Plan of the Reform of Higher Education and Scientific Research has five objectives:

- Improving the quality of university education and graduate employability
- Stimulating research and innovation
- Promoting good governance and optimize resource management
• Revising the university map for better anchoring and regional balance
• Improving teachers’ education

9.2 Overview of the education reform process and drivers

The preparation of the Strategic Plan for the Reform of Higher Education and Scientific Research was launched in October 2011 with the establishment of the National Tripartite Committee which includes representatives of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, university representatives and union representatives. The task started with the development of a scoping note in December 2011 and the organization of a national reflection seminar in July 2014. The Strategic Plan was developed and approved by the Universities Council in January 2015. After its validation by the council of Ministers, a participatory process of societal dialogue was launched. It involves all stakeholders in the system: teachers, students, civil society, professionals, private sector, regional officials and representatives of other ministries. The plan does also include consultations in different regions in Tunisia in order to emphasize the concerns and specificities, thus to prepare a plan which reflects all Tunisians’ needs and expectations.

During the final stage, a draft law will be submitted for approval to the Chamber of Deputies.

9.3 National reforms in Higher Education

9.3.1 2015

Start of the reform of engineering education.

9.3.2 2014

No information available.

9.3.3 2013

Decree No. 2013-47 of 4 January 2013 laying down the general framework of the system of education and the conditions for obtaining national diploma doctorate in the system “LMD”.

10 Legislation

3. Law No. 2009-21 of 28 April 2009 laying down the general framework for the practical training of students in higher education within administrations, companies or public or private institutions.
5. National Bachelor’s degree: Decree No. 2008-3123 of 22 September 2008, establishing a general framework for the system of education and the conditions for obtaining national diploma License in the various fields of training, referees, background and specialties of the system “LMD”.
6. National Master Degree: Decree No. 2012-1227 of 1 August 2012 laying down the general framework of the system of education and the conditions for obtaining national Master’s degree in the system “LMD”.
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