

**PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN UZBEKISTAN:
MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND INSTITUTIONAL DYNAMICS**

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Annotation. *This article provides an in-depth examination of management practices in public and private higher education institutions (HEIs) in Uzbekistan. It spans governance, financial management, faculty recruitment, curriculum innovation, and accountability. The analysis integrates empirical data, case examples—such as TEAM University and New Uzbekistan University—and insights from scholarly and policy literature. It highlights how ongoing reforms reshape institutional autonomy, quality assurance, and internationalization, offering implications for higher education policy and institutional strategy.*

Keywords: *Higher Education in Uzbekistan, Public vs. Private Universities, Higher Education Reform, University Governance, Institutional Autonomy, Higher Education Policy, Centralization in Higher Education, Quality Assurance in HEIs, Curriculum Innovation, Faculty Recruitment Practices, Financial Management in Universities, Internationalization of Higher Education, Education Accreditation Uzbekistan, Dual Degree Programs, Market-Oriented Education, Strategic Partnerships in Higher Education, Central Asia Higher Education, Post-Soviet Education Systems.*

Uzbekistan's higher education system has historically been highly centralized, with state-run institutions dominating the landscape. However, since 2017, reforms aimed at expanding access, increasing autonomy, and promoting private sector participation have accelerated changes in governance and institutional behavior.

As of the 2023–2024 academic year, there were 219 HEIs in Uzbekistan, compared to just 72 in 2017–2018, representing a 304% increase; notably, the number of private and foreign institutions has grown substantially [UzDaily.uz](https://uzdaily.uz). Moreover, entering the 2024–2025 year, 67 private universities were operating—surpassing the government's goal of 50 by 2026 thediplomat.com.

The urgency to broaden higher education participation is clear: the enrollment rate for 18–23-year-olds climbed from 8.3% in 2017 to 47.7% in 2024 [UzDaily.uz](https://uzdaily.uz). These developments signal profound shifts in institutional diversity and governance.

Governance structures in higher education vary significantly between public and private institutions, primarily in terms of centralization and institutional autonomy. Public higher education institutions (HEIs) largely remain under the control of the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Innovation, with rectors appointed by the Cabinet of Ministers. This governance structure is typically multilayered and hierarchical, which significantly limits the decision-making autonomy of universities (Cambridge University Press & Assessment; [UzDaily.uz](https://uzdaily.uz)). Ruziev and Burkhanov (2018) elaborate on this legacy of centralized governance, noting: “the approach to governance ... can be characterized as top down and centralized,”

marked by overlapping ministerial oversight and restricted flexibility for institutions to innovate or self-govern (Cambridge University Press & Assessment).

In contrast, private institutions—such as TEAM University, established in 2020—are governed by independent boards of trustees, which are designed to safeguard academic integrity and institutional operations against political or personal self-interest. These boards are typically composed of external experts, industry leaders, and academic professionals, enabling a more strategic and autonomous approach to governance. Additionally, such structures allow for quicker adaptation to educational trends, responsiveness to student and labor market needs, and the fostering of international collaborations.

A hybrid example is New Uzbekistan University, launched in 2021 by presidential decree, which represents a new model of a public yet autonomous institution. It incorporates international academic standards, merit-based recruitment, and modern governance arrangements, including strategic partnerships with global universities and independent academic councils. This evolution signals a potential shift in the governance of HEIs in Uzbekistan towards more autonomy and accountability, even within the public sector.

Public higher education institutions (HEIs) in Uzbekistan primarily rely on funding from state budgets. This centralized model limits their financial autonomy and offers restricted opportunities for revenue diversification or strategic reinvestment. As a result, public universities often face challenges in upgrading infrastructure, investing in research, or expanding academic offerings without direct government support.

In contrast, private and autonomous HEIs operate under more flexible financial frameworks. These institutions can diversify their revenue streams by leveraging tuition fees, forming partnerships with international organizations, and attracting private sector investment. A notable example is New Uzbekistan University, which actively collaborates with global partners such as TUM International and the MIT Abdul Latif Jameel World Education Lab (J-WEL).

These partnerships not only enhance academic quality and innovation but also contribute to a more resilient and diversified funding model. Through such collaborations, private HEIs are better positioned to pursue long-term strategic goals, adopt cutting-edge educational practices, and invest in human capital development.

In public higher education institutions (HEIs), faculty appointments, salary scales, and promotion pathways are typically governed by centralized regulations. This often restricts institutional flexibility in human resource management, limiting the ability to offer performance-based incentives or innovative recruitment practices. As a result, public universities may face challenges in attracting and retaining top academic talent, particularly in competitive or emerging fields.

In contrast, private HEIs—such as TEAM University—enjoy greater autonomy in designing and implementing their academic staffing strategies. These institutions can tailor recruitment processes to align with institutional goals, offer competitive compensation packages, and adopt merit-based hiring and promotion systems. This flexibility allows them to attract high-caliber national and international faculty, foster academic innovation, and respond more dynamically to market and educational trends.

Private HEIs often emphasize performance, international collaboration, and interdisciplinary teaching and research, which further enhances their appeal to both faculty and students.

Public institutions operate within standardized curricula approved by the state, which can limit responsiveness to labor market needs. Private and autonomous universities enjoy curricular flexibility. New Uzbekistan University, for example, runs programs in mechanical, chemical, software engineering, and AI, taught in English and supported by global collaborations. This market-oriented approach aligns with strategic modernization goals.

Additionally, since 2020, Uzbekistan has transitioned to a credit-modular system aligned with the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), enabling flexibility, mobility, and double degree programs theasiatoday.org. Moreover, Vanchukhina et al. (2022) describe a dual-degree, digitally integrated master's program between Russia and Uzbekistan focused on fintech, blending distance learning and joint diplomas [SpringerLink](https://www.springerlink.com).

Both public and private institutions undergo national accreditation. Private universities often seek international accreditation to enhance global recognition. The regulatory environment now includes institutional accreditation and oversight by the National Agency for Quality Assurance, reinforcing accountability frameworks [theasiatoday.orgUzDaily.uz](https://theasiatoday.org/UzDaily.uz). Reform emphasis extends to quality control, establishing governing councils and modern information systems for data-driven decision-making revistaespacios.comhttps://yuz.uz.

Uzbekistan's higher education sector faces distinct challenges and opportunities across public and private institutions. Public HEIs are hindered by bureaucratic inertia, limited autonomy, and outdated curricula, which slow innovation and responsiveness. However, they benefit from stable infrastructure, state funding, and a broad legacy presence across the country.

Private HEIs, such as TEAM University, enjoy more flexible governance and can quickly adapt to market needs through modern curricula and international partnerships. Yet they face challenges like regulatory uncertainty, concerns over affordability, and often limited research capacity.

Balancing the stability of public institutions with the innovation of private ones is essential for creating a resilient and forward-looking higher education system in Uzbekistan.

Uzbekistan's higher education sector is undergoing dynamic transformation, driven by a blend of central reforms and institutional innovation. While public HEIs continue to provide wide coverage and institutional stability, they face challenges of agility and modernization.

Private and autonomous universities, with their flexible governance, curricular innovation, and international partnerships, serve as engines for reform—but must navigate regulatory complexity and equity concerns. A hybrid approach—combining state support, institutional autonomy, rigorous quality assurance, and strategic collaboration—offers a promising path toward sustainable and inclusive higher education development in Uzbekistan.

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