The establishment of the erstwhile University of Cochin in 1971 was a commitment from the Government of Kerala towards the new scientific policy resolution adopted by the Central Government on 4th March 1958. The birth of the new University was with the specific purpose of “development of higher education with particular emphasis on post-graduate studies and research in applied science, technology, industry and commerce”. The University of Cochin was later reorganized as Cochin University of Science and Technology (CUSAT) in February 1986. Syndicate, Academic Council, Senate and the Boards of Studies in different Faculties are the Principal Authorities of the University. Syndicate is the Chief Executive Body which meets every month. The academic structure comprises of nine Faculties viz. Engineering, Environmental Studies, Humanities, Law, Marine Sciences, Medical Sciences and Technology, Science, Social Sciences and Technology. A Sophisticated Test and Instrumentation Centre (STIC) was established in 1996 in collaboration with the Government of Kerala. Centres also exist for Interdisciplinary Studies, Microprocessor Research, National Manpower Information, Rural Development & Appropriate Technology, Ocean Electronics Science in Society, Information Resource Management, Neuro Science, Creative Writing, Comparative Literature, Population Studies, Aquatic Animal Health, Monsoon Studies, Economic Policy and Analysis & Adult and Extension education. The UGC has selected cusat as a centre for Excellence in the field of Lasers and Opto-electronic sciences for which a new Centre, CELOS has been established. The Union Ministry of HRD has acknowledged School of Legal Studies as a Depository of Intellectual Property Rights and an IPR chair has been introduced. Another prestigious chair instituted by the Ministry of HRD is Rajiv Gandhi Chair on Sustainable Development. By giving recognition to several well-established premier research institutions in the country and the Southern Naval Command of Indian Navy, the University has brought within its reach the resources available in these institutions for the use of the academic community. Specialisations are available in almost all Faculties/Departments for higher studies and research.

The Ministry of Human Resources Development, Govt. of India has adjudged CUSAT as an institution to be upgraded to the level of IIT. The first installment of the development aid has been received by the University during April 2006 and the modification works to upgrade CUSAT as the new breed Indian Institute of Engineering Science and Technology (IIEST) are going in full swing.