

La France à la loupe

Higher education in France

Two SYSTEMS

Higher education covers all studies after the *baccalauréat* ('A' level equivalent). Two systems exist side by side:

- An **open system in the universities**. Most students study under this system. All *baccalauréat* holders have the right to enter this system without any prior selection procedure. The universities offer an extremely wide range of studies;
- A selective system with a limited number of places. Admission is by competitive examination, entrance examination or application form, with an interview where appropriate. This is the system in use in the **grandes écoles** (top graduate schools such as the *Ecole Nationale d'Administration* – French Senior Civil Service School – *Ecole Nationale Supérieure* – national post-graduate school – and the top engineering and business schools), the *instituts universitaires de technologie* (IUTs – **university institutes of technology**) and the *instituts universitaires professionnalisés* (IUPs – **university institutes of professional education**). These establishments train mainly public-sector and private-sector senior and middle managers.

STRUCTURING STUDIES

In 1999, the education ministers of 29 European countries met in Bologna to set a series of goals to **harmonise the architecture of the European higher education system** with a view to smoothing out the differences between the national systems and lifting the ensuing obstacles to student mobility. For the last few years, France has therefore been modernising its system to facilitate gradual careers guidance and further international student mobility by applying the three main principles of the European framework:

- The three-level **BMD system: Bachelors (three years of studies)/Masters/Doctorates**. France has two types of master's degrees: a "professional master's" and a "research master's" designed for students who wish to go on to a doctorate.
- A **European Credit Transfer System (ECTS)**: a credit corresponding to the student workload required to successfully complete a course module. These credits can be accumulated and transferred.
- An organisation into six-month periods and teaching units (modules).

THE CURRENT PRIORITIES

In 2006, the government made graduate employment a priority. The equal opportunities act of 31 March 2006 created [a work placement charter](#) signed by the government and both sides of industry to secure work placements by making them part of a knowledge-building pathway. This charter provides three guarantees: compulsory trainee management, a standard agreement binding on the three signatories, and assessment and monitoring systems.

A national debate on higher education and employment was launched on 25 April 2006 (see the [press release](#)) focusing on three issues:

- Guidance, information and employment;
- Making studies more work-orientated under the BMD system;
- Apprenticeships and the development of combined work/training schemes. (See the website address in the *To Find out more* section).

As part of this debate, a national commission chaired by Patrick Hetzel, Chief Administrative Officer of the Limoges Education Authority, submitted its final [report](#) on 24 October 2006.

An extensive, five-year reform of French higher education was launched in May 2007. The reform is designed to combat student failure at university; to make French universities more attractive to French and foreign students, and French and foreign teacher-researchers; to improve student living conditions; to improve staff's career paths; and to modernise university governance. The Law No. 2007-1199 on university autonomy and accountability – [loi n° 2007-1199 du 10 août 2007 relative aux libertés et responsabilités des universités](#) (French only), is the foundation for the reform of the higher education system: it gives universities a new organisation and new competencies by granting them greater autonomy. The government is to remain a key partner. It will set the objectives to be reached in terms of training, research and integration into employment, and the conditions for personnel assessment.

SOME FIGURES*

At the start of the 2006 higher education year, France had 2.287 million enrolled students including 1.357 million in the universities, 113,500 in the university institutes of technology and 76,000 on preparatory courses for the top graduate schools. The teaching staff totalled 89,000 (all positions together). In 2004, the proportion of foreign students stood at 11.3% (as opposed to 7% in 1998).

University student numbers remained virtually stable compared with the previous year. 2005-2006 posted a keen interest in the medical professions (medicine, pharmaceuticals and odontology) with a 6% rise in student numbers across all degree courses. Humanities and social sciences attracted the highest number of students.

The number of students on preparatory courses for the top graduate schools has been on the increase for several years, posting 76,000 in 2006 compared with 74,790 in 2005, with 47,369 on scientific courses.

In 2004, the government allocated €9.09 billion of its budget to higher education.

**Source: National Education Ministry*

To find out more

LEGISLATION

- ↻ French Education Code (Volumes VI, VII, VIII, IX – Title V)
<http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/WAspad/RechercheSimplePartieCode?commun=CEDUCA&code=CEDUCATL.rcv>

WEBSITES

- ↻ French Ministry for National Education, Higher Education and Research
<http://www.education.gouv.fr/>
- ↻ French Ministry in charge of Higher Education and Research
<http://www.recherche.gouv.fr/>
- ↻ The student gateway
<http://www.etudiant.gouv.fr/>
- ↻ The University-Employment debate website
<http://www.debat-universite-emploi.education.fr/>
- ↻ Website on university reform
<http://www.nouvelleuniversite.gouv.fr/>

DOCUMENTATION

- ↻ ***L'enseignement supérieur en France (Higher education in France)***: French Ministry of Foreign Affairs
http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/france_829/decouvrir-france_4177/france-a-z_2259/education_2621/colonne-droite_3254/sur-theme-..._3256/enseignement-superieur-france_8407.html
- ↻ ***Studying in France section***: French Ministry of Foreign Affairs
http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/services-formulaires_831/espace-etudiants_12793/index.html
- ↻ ***Studying in France***: French Embassy to Canada
http://www.ambafrance-ca.org/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=340
- ↻ ***Mieux comprendre la réforme LMD (Understanding the BMD reform)***: University of Avignon
http://www.univ-avignon.fr/actu/actu_lmd.html
- ↻ ***L'harmonisation de l'enseignement supérieur et le rapprochement université-emploi (Harmonising higher education and building a bridge between university and employment)***: French Prime Minister's website
http://www.premier-ministre.gouv.fr/chantiers/education_831/les_grands_axe_832/harmonisation_enseignement_superieur_rapprochement_56524.html

REPORTS

- Information report on the state of play in the universities (in French)/Jacques Valade, on behalf of the Cultural Affairs Commission, Senate – Information Report No. 160, January 2004.
<http://www.senat.fr/rap/r03-160/r03-160.html>

PUBLICATIONS

- **Universités et grandes écoles** / Jean-Richard Cytermann,- La Documentation française, Problèmes politiques et sociaux, n°936, mai 2007.
- **Les nouveautés de la rentrée universitaire 2006 (What's new in the 2006 university year?)**/French National Education Ministry – Newsletter, 5 October 2006.
ftp://trf.education.gouv.fr/pub/edutel/flash/lettre_flash_40.pdf
- **Le système éducatif (The education system)**/B. Toulemonde. – La Documentation française, “Les Notices” collection, 2006 (see, in particular, Notice 14 on Higher Education).
- **Les étudiants inscrits dans les 83 universités publiques françaises en 2005 (Students enrolled in the 83 French state universities in 2005)**/ French National Education Ministry. – Information Memo, 24 August 2006.
<ftp://trf.education.gouv.fr/pub/edutel/dpd/ni/ni2006/ni0624.pdf>
- **Les étudiants en classes préparatoires aux grandes écoles : année 2005-2006 (Students on preparatory courses for the top graduate schools: 2005-2006)**/French National Education Ministry. – Newsletter, 23 August 2006.
<ftp://trf.education.gouv.fr/pub/edutel/dpd/ni/ni2006/ni0623.pdf>
- **Repères et références statistiques sur les enseignements, la formation et la recherche (Facts and figures on education, training and research)**/French National Education Ministry, August 2006
<http://www-education-gouv-fr.aw.atosorigin.com/pid316/reperes-et-references-statistiques.html>
- **L'école nationale en chiffres (Figures on national education)**/French National Education Ministry, January 2005
ftp://trf.education.gouv.fr/pub/edutel/dpd/gchiffres_e2005/chiffre.pdf
- **Les établissements d'enseignement supérieur: structure et fonctionnement (Higher education establishments: structure and operation)**/French Ministry for National Education, Higher Education and Research, May 2002.
<http://www.sigu7.jussieu.fr/DPATED2/sf1.html>