

National summary sheets on education system in Europe and ongoing reforms

2009 Edition

FRANCE

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1. Education population and language of instruction

In 2007/08, the school population in metropolitan France and its overseas *départements* (DOM) for public and private sectors stood at 12 016 500 pupils, or 79 % of the population between the ages of 0 and 20, and 23.2 % of the total French population (6 645 100 in primary school and 5 371 400 in secondary education), and 2 228 000 students. In order for the education system to operate, the State employs almost 1 023 534 people, 829 131 of whom are public sector teachers.

The language of instruction is French. The regional languages are taught as part of the modern languages branch of studies.

2. Administrative control and extent of public-sector funded education

School education comes under the ministry responsible for education throughout the country. Free public-sector provision exists alongside education offered by private schools, the great majority of which have entered into a contract with the State enabling it to assume responsibility for teacher remuneration and also in most cases, as a result of so-called *contrats d'association* ('association contracts'), the functioning of the school concerned.

86.4 % of pupils in primary education and 79 % of those in secondary education attend State schools. The number of students in the private sector has remained stable for several years, at 2 030 781 (primary and secondary education, 2007/08).

Notwithstanding certain decentralisation measures under which responsibility for the construction and maintenance of public-sector school buildings has been entrusted to the local area authorities, the central government has retained a decisive role in the area of educational policy. The ministry responsible for national education draws up in detail the curriculum for each subject and level of education, and provides guidelines for teaching without however obliging teachers to adopt a particular method. It administers the recruitment, training and management of teaching staff, determines the status and regulations of schools running, allocating them their appropriate quota of staff. The ministry also organises examinations and awards national qualifications, in particular the certificate *baccalauréat* which testifies to the satisfactory completion of secondary schooling.

In order to implement this policy and accomplish its numerous management tasks, the ministry has 'external' administrative departments known as *académies*. France is thus divided into 30 such *académies* each headed by a rector acting directly on behalf of the minister. An *académie* is the administrative level enabling the regional application of education policies as defined by the government. It allows action to be taken according to local contexts in collaboration with territorial communities: *communes* for primary education, *départements* for *collèges* (institutions providing lower secondary education) and *régions* for *lycées* (institutions offering higher secondary education). Within the overall system established at national level, schools are to some extent independent as regards their administrative and teaching activity and, at secondary level (in *collèges* and *lycées*), their financial affairs too. In practice, this relative independence is expressed in a plan for each school, known as a *projet d'école* and *projet d'établissement* at primary and secondary levels respectively

The system is supervised by several inspectorates. Three general inspectorates are entrusted with very broad responsibilities for evaluation at national level: *Inspection générale de l'Éducation nationale* (IGEN), *Inspection générale de l'Administration de l'Éducation nationale et de la Recherche* (IGAENR) and *Inspection générale des Bibliothèques* (IGB).

Furthermore, two territorial inspectorates exist: *Inspecteurs de l'Éducation nationale* (IEN) visit primary schools and monitor the performance of teachers, and *Inspecteurs d'académie – Inspecteurs pédagogiques régionaux* (IA-IPR) are responsible for marking and assessing schoolteachers at secondary level.

3. Pre-primary education

École maternelle (nursery school)	Ages 2 to 6
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France has a long tradition of pre-primary education. Despite the fact that it is not compulsory, all children attend the *école maternelle* (nursery school) from the age of 2 onwards. pre-primary education is available for all children aged 2 to 6, regardless of their nationality, though provision to children aged 2 is based on availability.

Public nursery schools are the responsibility of the education ministry and attendance at them is free of charge. In 2007/08, 2 551 050 children, including 23.3 % of children aged 2 and 100 % of children aged 3 to 6 attended nursery school. 319 032 children attended private schools, where parents pay a share of the tuition fees.

Nursery schools have programmes of teaching and learning activity. They correspond to the *cycles des apprentissages premiers* (basic learning stage). As a rule, children are grouped together by age into three 'sections': a first 'small' section (for children aged 2 and 3), an intermediate section (those aged 4) and a 'main' section (for 5-year-olds). The main educational areas of activity contribute to the overall development of children and prepare them for primary school (*école élémentaire*).

4. Compulsory education

(i) Phases

Education is compulsory between the ages of 6 and 16. It is divided into three stages:

<i>École élémentaire</i> (primary education)	Ages 6-11
<i>Collège</i> (lower secondary education)	Ages 11-15
<i>Lycée d'enseignement général et technologique</i> (upper secondary education) or <i>Lycée professionnel</i> (upper secondary vocational education)	Ages 15-18

(ii) Admission criteria

The enrolment of pupils in State schooling is based on a 'catchment area principle': pupils are normally registered in the primary school, *collège* or *lycée* of the geographical area in which their parents live (known as a *secteur* in the case of the *collège*, and a *district* in that of the *lycée*). Within the context of the increased flexibility as regards the distribution of school catchment areas since the beginning of the 2007/08 academic year, it is possible for parents seeking to enrol their child in a school located outside their assigned catchment area to request an exemption.

State education is free of charge. Parents who so wish may register their child in private education, freely choosing their school provided that places are available. Fees in schools that have entered into a contract with the State are not usually very high, as a result of the substantial State funding received by these institutions.

(iii) Length of the school day/week/year

The school year comprises 180 days between September and June. Schools are open six days a week, but no classes are given on Wednesday afternoons and Saturdays at primary level. Each week includes 24 one-hour lessons at primary level (each lasting 60 minutes) and 25.5 to 30 lessons (of 55 minutes) in secondary education (with three additional hours for pupils who have fallen behind or for optional subjects). The annual number of hours is 864 in primary education and approximately 936 at lower secondary level.

(iv) Class size/student grouping

There is no recommended size for classes, which may vary in accordance with the policy of the *recteur* and the *inspecteur d'académie*, who should take account of local circumstances (such as those of disadvantaged or rural areas). The national average is close to 25 pupils per class in primary education, 24 in *collèges*, 28 in *lycées généraux et technologiques* and 20 in *lycées professionnels*. Pupils are generally grouped on the basis of their age, but due to the significant number of pupils who repeat a year, there are differences in ages which may vary from one institution or class to another. Primary school classes have a single teacher for all subjects, whereas secondary school classes have different teachers for each subject.

(v) Curricular control and content

The education ministry determines school curricula and the aims underlying the acquisition of knowledge and skills by pupils. Teachers choose their own teaching methods and school textbooks. The 'elementary' school curriculum concentrates on the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic, as well as enhancing motor skills, awareness and sensitivity. The lower secondary education curriculum consists of eight or nine compulsory subjects depending on the year of study, and becomes increasingly diversified with the inclusion of optional subjects.

(vi) Assessment, progression and qualifications

The work of primary schools and *collèges* is organised into successive stages of teaching as follows:

- the *école élémentaire* consists of two stages: the basic learning skills stage (*cycle des apprentissages fondamentaux*) which begins in the 'main' section of nursery school and is continued during the first two years of *école élémentaire* (preparatory class – *cours préparatoire* or 'CP', followed by first-year primary class, *cours élémentaire 1ère année* or 'CE 1'), and then the skills development stage (*cycle des approfondissements*) comprising the final three years ('CE 2', followed by first and second-year medium classes known as *cours moyen 1ère et 2ème années*, 'CM 1' and 'CM 2', respectively) prior to entering *collège*. In order to take account of individual learning rates, the period spent by a pupil in each of the stage may be extended or reduced by a year, by decision of the *conseil des professeurs* (teacher council);
- education at *collège* lasts four years and is broken down into three stages
 - the observation and adaptation stage (*cycle d'observation et d'adaptation*), corresponding to the sixth class (6ème);
 - the stage that aims to deepen pupils' knowledge and work skills (*cycle central*) consisting of the fifth and fourth classes (4ème and 5ème);
 - the vocational guidance stage (*cycle d'orientation*) corresponding to the third class (3ème).

Pupils are continuously assessed by teachers throughout the whole of their primary and secondary schooling. A year can only be repeated at the end of a complete stage, a decision against which parents can appeal. National assessments take place at the beginning of CE2 and *collège* to identify the progress and weaknesses of pupils. This also allows national references to be established. Since the beginning of the 2006/07 academic year, a *note de vie scolaire* (giving marks for school life) has been awarded to *collège* pupils, from the sixth class to the third class: it assesses, inter alia, a pupil's regular attendance and respect for school rules.

There is no primary-school leaving examination for successful completion of that stage or for determining how the pupil will be allocated in lower secondary education. Every pupil is entitled to enter the sixth class unless the teacher concerned objects. At the age of 12, all pupils must leave primary education and must enrol at *collège*, irrespective of their level. There is no document certifying completion of primary education.

Pupils in very considerable difficulty at school and/or socially at the end of primary education are catered for within sections for adapted general and vocational teaching (*sections d'enseignement général et professionnel adapté*, SEGPA) in *collèges*. Furthermore from the fourth class (4ème) onwards, arrangements for alternated school/workplace provision enable pupils in difficulty to become directly familiar with the world of work and discover more about different occupations. Finally, a reform of the third class (3ème), which took effect at the beginning of the 2005/06 school year, plans to make discovering the world of work one of the optional courses on offer.

The education received over the last two years (fourth and third classes – 4ème and 3ème) is approved by a certificate, called **diplôme national du brevet**. Pupils from State schools and private schools that have entered into a contract with the State are registered for the examinations through school heads. Entry into a *lycée* is not dependent on having the *brevet*: the two decisions, that is the award of the certificate and guidance, are separate. The decision on guidance takes into account pupils' specific abilities and interests in further studies; it is the outcome of negotiation between the pupil, his or her family and the educational team.

5. Post-compulsory education/upper secondary and post-secondary level

(i) Types of education

<i>Lycée d'enseignement général et technologique</i>	Ages 15-18
<i>Lycée professionnel</i>	Ages 15-17/19

On completion of *collège*, pupils are offered three educational curricula:

- general curriculum;
- technological curriculum;
- vocational curriculum.

At the *lycée d'enseignement général et technologique*, which caters for pupils who have chosen either of the first two possibilities, provision lasts three years consisting of the 'second', 'first' and 'final' classes (*2de, 1ère et terminale*), and leads to the general and technological *baccalauréat* examination.

Only on completion of the 'second' class common to all pupils do the latter choose the type of *baccalauréat* they intend to work towards: this may be one of the three general categories (economic and social, literary, or scientific) or one of six technological categories: management sciences and technology (*sciences et technologies de la gestion* – STG); industrial sciences and technology (*Sciences et technologies industrielles* – STI); laboratory sciences and technology (*Sciences et technologies du laboratoire* – STL); health and social sciences and technology (*Sciences et technologies de la santé et du social* – ST2S); musical and dance technique (*techniques de la musique et de la danse* – TMD); hotel trade.

The *lycée professionnel* prepares students in two years for the first level of vocational qualification, corresponding to the *certificat d'aptitude professionnelle* (CAP) or *brevet d'études professionnelles* (BEP). These qualifications are designed to provide direct access to employment. However, pupils who so wish may then go on to study for two years (in the first and final vocational classes – *1ère et terminale professionnelles*) for a vocational *baccalauréat* in one of 48 specialised fields on offer.

(ii) Admission criteria

The admissions criteria are the same as those applied to compulsory education.

(iii) Curricular control and content

From the start of upper secondary education onwards, the existence of very clearly distinctive curriculum and categories of provision results in a certain variety of content and, above all, in major differences in the relative scale of provision across subject areas, depending on what pupils choose. Yet curricular content remains entirely the prerogative of the State.

Basic subjects in the first year of the *lycées généraux et technologiques* (the so-called second class) are French, mathematics, physics/chemistry, life and earth sciences, foreign language 1, history/geography, physical education and sport, supplemented by two further subjects that must be chosen by pupils, and one which may be. In the first and final-year classes (*classes de première et terminale*), the list of compulsory subjects and time devoted to them depend on how they are grouped.

The *lycées professionnels* offer both general education and theoretical and practical vocational training, including in-company placements. The reference system for vocational qualifications awarded by the education ministry (see IV below) is always worked out in partnership with the

economic sector concerned, within consultative vocational committees (*commissions professionnelles consultatives* – CPC).

(iv) Assessment, progression and qualifications

Pupils admitted to a *lycée d'enseignement général et technologique* are assessed throughout the so-called second class, during which they choose the kind of *baccalauréat* that appears to correspond best to their ability and interests. At the end of the year and with due regard for the results of assessment, the teachers' board accepts or refuses to accept their choice. In the latter case, their parents are entitled to appeal.

The first class and the final class constitute **the final stage** of preparation for the *baccalauréat*.

In *lycées professionnels*, students' preparation for qualifications at two levels always includes an in-company placement period. In appropriate cases, a procedure of accreditation of prior experimental learning (*validation des acquis professionnels*) may exempt students from taking some of the examinations that normally have to be sat. The *baccalauréat*, whether general, technological or vocational, gives access to higher education. However, while the general and technological *baccalauréat* are geared to the continuation of further studies, the vocational *baccalauréat* is primarily intended to provide direct access to employment.

6. Tertiary education

(i) Structure

Higher education in France is provided by a range of coexisting institutions with different purposes, structures and conditions for admission. Three types of institution offer provision: **universities**, **établissements publics à caractère administratif (EPA)**, which are under the supervision of different ministries, and **instituts ou écoles supérieures privés**. They offer five types of provision:

- university programmes;
- 'grandes écoles';
- preparatory classes (*classes préparatoires*) for the *grandes écoles* – (CPGE) offered in *lycées*;
- *sections de techniciens supérieurs* – STS;
- *écoles spécialisées*.

(ii) Access

Higher education studies are divided as follows:

- those which may be accessed directly with a *baccalauréat* or equivalent qualification, without a selection procedure: university programmes, with the exception of *instituts universitaires de technologie* (IUT);
- those which may be accessed via a selection procedure: CPGE, STS, IUT and *écoles spécialisées*. The selection procedure is based on an admission application. The type of *baccalauréat* awarded and the grades achieved during the last two years of *lycée* are determining factors;
- those which may be accessed via a competitive examination, for which students receive preparatory tuition lasting two years in CPGE: the most prestigious tertiary education institutions, normally known as *grandes écoles*;

- those which may be accessed via a selection procedure usually after obtaining a *licence* (*Bachelor*): programmes at *instituts universitaires de formation des maîtres* (IUFM) (tertiary education institution which is attached administratively to one or more universities and offers short full-time teacher education courses).

(iii) Qualifications

The implementation of the 'LMD reform (*Licence-Master-Doctorat*)', within the context of the Bologna Process and gearing the structure of French higher education to the European system by offering three levels of studies (*licence/master/doctorat*), brings with it a new degree structure for higher education, i.e.:

- Degrees obtained after 2 years of post-*baccalauréat* studies, corresponding to 120 European credits (ECTS): *diplôme universitaire de technologie* (DUT, or technological university degree), *diplôme d'études universitaires scientifiques et techniques* (DEUST, or scientific and technical university degree), *brevet de technicien supérieur* (BTS, higher technician's diploma), *diplôme d'études universitaires générales* (DEUG, or general university degree);
- Degrees obtained after 3 years of post-*baccalauréat* studies, corresponding to 180 ECTS credits: *diplôme national de technologie spécialisée* (DNST, or national specialised technology diploma), *licence professionnelle*, *licence*;
- Intermediate degree, obtained after 4 years of post-*baccalauréat* studies, corresponding to 240 ECTS credits: master's degree, also called 'master 1';
- Degrees obtained after 5 years of post-*baccalauréat* studies, corresponding to 300 ECTS credits: master's degree, *diplôme d'études approfondies* (DEA, or advanced studies degree), *diplôme d'études supérieures spécialisées* (DESS, or specialised higher studies degree);
- Degrees obtained after post-master's studies, corresponding to 480 ECTS credits: doctorate.

7. Special needs

Pupils with special educational needs normally attend mainstream schools. At primary school, *classes d'intégration scolaire* (CLIS, or classes for school integration) cater for pupils who have mental, hearing, visual or motor disabilities, but who are able to benefit in conventional school surroundings from provision adapted to their age, ability and the nature and scale of their own particular disability. In secondary education, *sections d'enseignement général et professionnel adapté* (SEGPA) in *collèges* cater for pupils who have experienced serious difficulty at school on leaving primary education. Furthermore, *unités pédagogiques d'intégration* (UPI, or educational integration units) have been set up in the last few years in some *collèges*. These units are intended specifically for pupils with disability, with the special purpose of ensuring that those who have attended CLIS progress smoothly from primary to secondary education. These pupils may thus continue to receive specially adapted provision in a mainstream school environment. The minister responsible for national education has decided to significantly increase the number of such units.

Specialised institutions for pupils in more serious difficulty are the responsibility of either the education ministry (in the case of *établissements régionaux d'enseignement adapté* catering for pupils aged mainly between 11 and 18, who gain little from attending other schools for which the ministry is responsible: 10 755 pupils in 2007/08), or the Ministry of Health, the Family and Handicapped Persons.

8. Teachers

Teacher training is provided at *Instituts universitaires de formation des maîtres* (IUFM) after 3 years of post *baccalauréat* studies (preceding entry to the IUFM). Access to the profession for **all levels of education** takes place by means of a competitive examination, followed by an in-class placement which must be validated by a *certificat d'aptitude* (certificate): *concours externe de recrutement de professeur des écoles* (external competition for the recruitment of school teachers): **CERPE**; *certificat d'aptitude au professorat de l'enseignement du second degré* (teacher training certificate for secondary level): **CAPE**; *certificat d'aptitude au professorat de l'éducation physique et sportive* (teacher training certificate for physical education and sport), secondary level: **CAPEPS**; *certificat d'aptitude au professorat des lycées professionnels* (teacher training certificate for vocational lycées): **CAPLP**; *certificat d'aptitude au professorat de l'enseignement technologique* (teacher training certificate for technology) (*lycée*): **CAPET** or **agrégation**) or successful performance in a professional qualification examination. Those who are successful in competitive examinations for permanent posts are offered teaching positions in an *académie*.

Two categories exist at the level of **higher education**:

- 1) **research teachers**: lecturers (*maîtres de conférences*) and university professors who have the dual task of ensuring the development of basic and applied research and of conveying the resulting knowledge to students. They are permanent State employees;
- 2) **other higher education teaching staff**: associate or guest professors; secondary level teaching staff in higher education; professors who teach *classes préparatoires* (CPGE); assistant teachers (post which is disappearing); temporary teaching and research assistants; foreign language teachers and lecturers; auxiliaries (*chargés d'enseignement vacataires*) and temporary auxiliaries (*agents temporaires vacataires*).

Teachers' service forms part of the organisation of the academic year.

At primary school level, 864 teaching hours are allocated to all pupils and an average of 3 hours per week, that is 108 hours per year, take place under the responsibility of the *inspecteur de l'éducation nationale* who is responsible for the district in which the teachers in question work.

The service of 108 hours per year is assigned as follows:

- 60 hours allocated to personalised assistance or to work in small groups, in particular at nursery level;
- 24 hours allocated to: work in educational teams (activities within the school's *conseil des maîtres de l'école* (school teacher council)) and the *conseil des maîtres de cycle* (stage teacher council); parent liaison; drawing up and monitoring the personalised education projects of pupils with a disability;
- 18 hours allocated to educational development and training;
- 6 hours allocated to participation at compulsory school councils.

Members of staff teaching at secondary schools are required, over the academic year, to provide 540 hours service each year (in the case of those holding the *agrégation*) or 648 hours service (in the case of those holding *certificats d'aptitude*). The following are the weekly maximums:

- Holders of the *agrégation*: 15 hours;
- Holders of the *certificat d'aptitude*: 18 hours.

For teachers in higher education, the legislature has set the annual number of hours at 192. However, in compliance with the Education Code and having regard to scientific and educational priorities, the administrative board of each higher-education establishment defines the general principles for allocating the service of research teachers between their various duties. It also determines the hourly equivalences of each of those activities and their detailed practical arrangements.

The president or director of the establishment takes individual decisions on the allocation of the service of research teachers, taking into consideration the interests of the service after consultation with the head of the subject component and the head of the research unit concerned. The work schedule of each research teacher is sent to him at the start of the university year and is adapted to each semester of teaching.

9. Current reforms and priorities

After-school educational support

Educational support makes it possible to cater for voluntary pupils after classes and to offer them help with homework and lessons or sporting, artistic and cultural activities. The intended duration is two hours at the end of the school day after classes, four times per week. At the beginning of the 2008/09 academic year, it was widely adopted by all State *collèges* and private *collèges* which have entered into a contract with the State, as well as by priority education elementary schools.

Reform of lycées

A reform of *lycées* was launched at the beginning of the 2008/09 academic year to achieve the objective, set out in the 2005 orientation law, of 50 % of an age group obtaining a university qualification. The first stage of that reform is the introduction of a new structure for the second class level, initially planned to apply from the beginning of the 2009/10 academic year. A pupil's timetable will consist of 30 hours (as opposed to 28 to 35 at present) and the second class will comprise two semesters consisting of a common foundation of 21 hours per week of obligatory general education. Each of those semesters will consist of 18 hours of classes and the year will be separated by a week which will be 'a period of review and orientation', as well as training exercises and orals. In the middle of each semester, a class board at which the pupils will review their difficulties together with their teachers will take place and, at the end of the semester, a 'real' board will take place to deal in particular with orientation. This arrangement will replace the present three quarterly boards.

Following a lively debate sparked by opponents of the reform in December 2008, Xavier Darcos, the State Education Minister, decided to allow more time for its implementation.

University reform

Reform of the universities was endorsed on 10 August 2007 by the vote approving the Law on the Freedoms and Responsibilities of Universities. That law strengthens the universities' links with their territorial and socio-economic environment by means of:

- the participation of territorial communities in defining university training, recruitment and vocational integration policies;
- the presence of two economic and social stakeholders, including at least one entrepreneur or executive, on the administrative board of universities, with the aim of encouraging undertakings to invest fully in the development of knowledge;

- the creation of partnerships between universities and other stakeholders from the world of science.

The schedule for implementation of the reform provides for:

1) Provisions to be implemented immediately in all universities

- Adoption of internal regulations by the establishments (Article 3 of the law) by 11 February 2008, at the latest;
- Participation by researchers from research bodies in the democratic life of the establishment;
- Training and information for elected student representatives;
- Establishment of a student vice-president on the board of studies and university life;
- Creation of the office to assist in vocational integration;
- Student recruitment in accordance with the conditions provided for by decree;
- Doctoral sponsorship in accordance with the conditions provided for by decree;
- Creation of a joint technical committee.

2) Provisions applicable by 11 August 2008, at the latest

- New responsibilities of the administrative board;
- Representation of doctoral candidates on the scientific board;
- Recruitment of research teachers (selection committee);
- Representation of the main branches of learning;
- Consultative power of the scientific board and the board of studies and university life;
- Role of the scientific board in matters relating to staff management;
- Selection of the university president by elected members of the administrative board;
- New presidential powers (right to object, casting vote);
- New system of subject components;
- Creation of training and research units by consultation with the administrative board, after receiving the opinion of the scientific board;
- Creation of schools and institutes by order of the minister responsible for higher education;
- New system of medical training and research units.

3) Provision applicable from the beginning of the 2008/09 university year

Freedom to enrol on undergraduate courses and active guidance in the context of compulsory pre-registration.

4) Extended responsibilities (5-year deadline)

- General budget – certification of accounts;
- Operating grant for joint units and services adopted by the university's administrative board;

- Allocation of service obligations of teaching and research staff;
- Award of bonuses;
- Introduction of incentive measures for staff;
- Recruitment of Category A contractual staff for a fixed or indefinite period.

5) Voluntary responsibilities without a deadline for implementation

- Creation of subsidiaries and acquisition of stake;
- Creation of university foundations;
- Creation of partnership foundations;
- Full ownership of assets.

Finally, under the reform, the content of the first year of the *licence* has been renewed as part of the overall renewal of that degree. The reform is intended to limit the failure rate and to make the *licence* a true national degree qualifying holders to continue their studies or enter a profession. The programmes provided to students and their employment opportunities will be evaluated on the basis of a set of national specifications drawn up in consultation with the stakeholders. Four requirements are imposed on universities in those specifications:

- taking into account student diversity and strengthening the educational structure;
- strengthening multidisciplinary and developing progressive specialisation;
- adapting the *licence* to employment and facilitating changes in guidance;
- ensuring greater transparency of educational provision.

Unrevised English

For more detailed information on the education systems in Europe, you may consult the EURYDICE data base, EURYBASE (<http://www.eurydice.org>)