

FRANCE

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I Description of the French Education System

1. Education population and language of instruction

In 2002/03, the school population in metropolitan France and its overseas *départements* (DOM) stood at 14 334 000 pupils and students, out of a total population of a little over 60 million inhabitants, which was broken down as follows :

- 6 529 000 pupils in primary education ('pre-elementary' and 'elementary' education),
- 5 596 000 pupils in secondary education,
- 2 209 000 students in higher education.

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

In France, school education comes under the Minister for Youth, Education and Research. Free public-sector provision, which caters for 86.5% of pupils in primary education and 79.9% of those in secondary education, exists alongside education offered by private schools. The great majority of the private schools 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 the so-called *contrats d'association* ('association contracts'); the functioning of the school itself.

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 (*région*), the central government has retained a decisive role in the area of educational policy. The ministry responsible for 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, allocating them their appropriate quota of staff. The ministry also organises examinations and awards national qualifications, in particular the baccalaureate which testifies to the satisfactory completion of secondary schooling.

In order to implement this policy and the accomplishment of 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 « *recteur* » acting directly on behalf of the minister. A single *académie* covers several *départements* (the *département* corresponds to the traditional administrative subdivision of France since the Revolution). Each *département* is managed by an *inspecteur d'académie*.

3. Pre-primary education

France has a long tradition of 'pre-elementary' education. Despite the fact that it is not compulsory, all the children in France attend the *école maternelle* (nursery school) from the age of 3 onwards. Nursery schools are indeed schools in the full sense with programmes of teaching and learning activity. They correspond to the 'initial learning' stage. As a rule, children are grouped together by age into three 'sections': a first 'small' section (for those aged 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 'elementary' school. Teachers belong to the same professional category of

professeurs des écoles as those in 'elementary' school. They are trained to the same level (the baccalaureate followed by five years of tertiary education) as the so-called *professeurs certifiés* of the secondary education.

4. Compulsory education

a) Phases

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

- primary education : all pupils go to the *école élémentaire* between the ages of 6 and 11,
- lower secondary education : all pupils attend *collège* from the ages of 11 to 15,
- upper secondary education : pupils gain admission, normally at the age of 15, either to a *lycée d'enseignement général et technologique* (general and technological lycée) or to a *lycée professionnel* (vocational lycée) in order to begin the *classe de seconde* (fifth year of secondary schooling), on completion of which, they reach the age corresponding to the ending of the compulsory education.

b) Admissions criteria

The enrolment of pupils in state schooling is based on a 'sectorial' 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*). 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.

(c) 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 or Saturday afternoons. Each week includes 26 one-hour lessons at primary level and 25.5 to 30 hours (55-minute lessons) in secondary education (with three additional hours for pupils who have fallen behind or for optional subjects). The annual minimum number of hours is 846 in primary education and 842 at lower secondary level.

d) 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. Primary school classes have a single teacher for all subjects, whereas secondary school classes have different teachers for each subject.

(e) 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 on physical education (normal motor skills, etc.) and enhancing awareness and sensitivity
- The lower secondary education curriculum consists of eight or nine compulsory subjects depending on the year of study. It becomes increasingly diversified with the inclusion of optional subjects.

f) Assessment, progression and qualifications

Pupils are continuously assessed by teachers throughout the course of their primary and secondary schooling. Since 1989, 'diagnostic assessment' of pupils at the beginning of the third and sixth years of compulsory education has enabled teachers to identify the progresses and weaknesses of their pupils in French and mathematics. The work of primary schools and *collèges* is organised into successive stages of teaching as follows:

- the *école élémentaire* consists of two stages: the stage of fundamental learning which begins in the 'main' section of nursery school and is continued during the first two years of 'elementary' school (preparatory classes, or CP, followed by first-year 'elementary' classes, or CE 1), and then the stage of further learning comprising the final three years (CE 2, followed by first- and second-year intermediate classes known as 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 stages may be extended or reduced by a year, by decision of the *conseil des professeurs* (board of teachers),
- education at *collège* lasts four years (corresponding to what are known as the sixth, fifth, fourth and third classes, respectively). It is broken down into three stages:
 - the 'adaptation' stage, corresponding to the sixth class;
 - the consolidation stage consisting of the fifth and fourth classes;
- the 'orientation' stage corresponding to the third class, including classes with a 'technology' option.

A year can only be repeated at the end of a complete stage; a decision against which parents can appeal. Pupils in very considerable difficulty at school and/or socially, at the end of primary education, are catered for within sections for specially adapted general and vocational teaching (SECPA) in *collèges*. Furthermore from the 'fourth' form 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' form, due to take 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. On completion of their *collège* schooling, pupils are awarded a *brevet* (national certificate) on the basis of their marks in the final two years (fourth and third classes) and a national examination. The *brevet* is not a compulsory qualification and continuation of their schooling in a *lycée* is not dependent on their passing the examination.

5. Upper secondary and post-secondary education

a) Types of education

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

- general studies which after three years (the so-called 'second', 'first' and 'final' classes) lead to the general baccalaureate,
- technological studies which lead to the technological baccalaureate, also after three years,
- vocational training which, after two years, leads to the *certificat d'aptitude professionnelle* (CAP) or the *brevet d'études professionnelles* (BEP) and then, after a further two years, to the *baccalauréat professionnel*.

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, and leads to the general baccalaureate examination.

Only on completion of the 'second' class, common to all, the pupils do the latter choose about the type of baccalaureate they intend to work towards: this may be one of the three general categories (economic and social, literary, or scientific) or one of seven technological categories.

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 more years (in the first and final vocational classes) for a vocational baccalaureate in one of the 48 specialised fields on offer.

b) Admissions criteria

See b) above; compulsory education

c) Curricular control and content

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

Basic subjects in the first year of the *lycées généraux et technologiques* 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 the pupils. In penultimate and final-year classes, the list of compulsory subjects and time devoted to them depend on how they are grouped (into any one of three general or seven technological subject combinations).

The vocational *lycées* (*lycée professionnel*) 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 d) below) is always worked out in partnership with the economic sector concerned, within consultative vocational committees (*commissions professionnelles consultatives*, or CPC).

d) Assessment, progression and qualifications

Pupils admitted to a *lycée d'enseignement général et technologique* are assessed throughout their first year (the so-called second class), during which they choose the kind of baccalaureate 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 baccalaureate is held on completion of the final class but, in some subject areas, pupils take the examination on completion of the first class (second year).

The *lycées professionnels* prepare students for qualifications at two levels: the first of them (level V), leads to two types of national qualification: the *certificat d'aptitude professionnelle* and the *brevet d'études professionnelles*; satisfactory completion of the second (level IV) culminates in the award of the *baccalauréat professionnel*. Work for these qualifications always includes an in-company placement period. In appropriate cases, a procedure for validating professional qualifications and experience may exempt students from taking some of the examinations that normally have to be sat. The baccalaureate, whether general, technological or vocational, gives access to higher education.

However, while the general and technological baccalaureates (*lycée d'enseignement général et technologique*) are geared to the continuation of further studies, the vocational baccalaureate (*lycée professionnel*) is primarily intended to provide direct access to employment.

6. Higher Education

a) Types of institution

Higher education is provided in the *universités*, or in higher public or private 'schools'. Some of them are known as *grandes écoles* (Polytechnique, E.N.A., Centrale, H.E.C., etc.). Institutes or schools may be attached to universities. They include *instituts universitaires de technologie* (IUTs) providing short technological courses, *instituts universitaires professionnalisés* (IUPs) for students working for qualifications in engineering, and *instituts universitaires de formation des maîtres* (IUFMs) which prepare students for competitive examinations to recruit teachers and provide teacher training, etc. Some *lycées* contribute to higher education because they offer preparatory tuition to those seeking admission to the *grandes écoles*, in so-called *classes préparatoires aux grandes écoles* (CPGE), or because they include *sections de techniciens supérieurs* (STS, or sections for higher technicians) which provide short technical training courses.

b) Access

- Universities accept either holders of the baccalaureate, those holders of the *diplôme d'accès aux études universitaires* (DAEU, or 'diploma for admission to university studies'), or those with a qualification regarded as equivalent, without any further selection procedure, except in the medical, dental and pharmaceutical fields and in the case of the IUTs (*instituts universitaires de technologie*).
- Admission to the most prestigious higher 'schools' normally known as *grandes écoles* is by competitive examination, on the recommendation of an Admissions Board or by specific qualifications, for which students receive preparatory tuition lasting two years in the CPGE. Generally speaking, admission to the very wide variety of institutions in the non-university sector is based on strict selection procedures.

c) Qualifications

Long university courses have traditionally been structured into three successive stages of study leading to national degrees: the *diplôme d'études universitaires générales* (DEUG, or 'diploma of general university studies') covering a two-year period after the baccalaureate; the *licence* (roughly equivalent to a Bachelor's degree, a further year), the *maîtrise* (roughly equivalent to a Master's degree, a further year still, corresponding to four years after the baccalaureate), and then qualifications obtained in the third stage of studies, namely the *diplôme d'études supérieures spécialisées* (DESS, or 'diploma of specialised higher studies'), the *diplôme d'études approfondies* (DEA, or 'diploma of more advanced studies') and the doctorate.

However, since April 2002 and in accordance with the implementation of the Bologna Process to develop a European Higher Education Area, a set of regulations has been published with a view to gradually gearing the structure of French higher education to the European system of 3-5-8 (corresponding to three, five and eight years after the baccalaureate), or LMD standing for *Licence*, *Master* and *Doctorat*.

Accordingly, the ministry responsible for higher education is encouraging universities in the process of renewing their four-yearly contract to structure their courses into semesters and

modules enabling students to obtain credits in accordance with the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). Students who acquire 180 credits normally over a period of three years (6 semesters) may obtain the *licence* (degree); 300 credits are necessary (i.e. an additional 120 after the *licence*, corresponding to two further years / 4 semesters of study) for the award of the *master*.

Furthermore, there is a *master professionnel* (Master's vocational qualification) geared to the labour market, and *master recherche* (Master's research qualification), preparation for which is similar to study for the DEA and constitutes the first stage of doctoral studies lasting three years until the doctorate itself is obtained (480 credits).

Short technological higher education courses lasting two years lead to the *diplôme universitaire de technologie* (DUT) prepared in the IUTs (*instituts universitaires de technologie*), or to the *brevet de technicien supérieur* (BTS, or higher technician's diploma) that students work towards in the higher technician's sections in some *lycées*.

The *écoles supérieures* (schools for higher education) award their own diplomas. Public-sector or private engineering schools award a diploma that has to be recognised by the committee for engineering qualifications. Business and management schools award a diploma which, under certain circumstances, may be recognised by the State.

7. Apprenticeship

In France, this both theoretical and technical training is greatly appreciated by the firms. Apprenticeship aims at providing young people between the ages of 16 and 25 with general, theoretical and practical training so that they may earn any degree, from the CAP/BEP (most frequently) to an engineering diploma. Apprenticeships involve alternating work-study training. During the contract period, the young person is an apprentice: as such, he or she is both an employee of a firm and a student in an apprentice training centre (CFA), vocational school, higher school or university.

8. Special education

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 difficulties, or problems with their hearing, sight or normal bodily movements, 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 difficulty. In secondary education, *sections d'enseignement général et professionnel adapté* (SEGPA, or streams for specially adapted general and vocational provision) in *collèges* cater for pupils who have experienced serious difficulty at school on leaving primary education. Furthermore, *unités pédagogiques d'intégration* (UPI, or units for educational integration) have been set up in the last few years in some *collèges*. These units are intended specifically for pupils in difficulty, 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 normal school environment. The minister 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), or the Ministry of Health, the Family and Handicapped Persons.

9. Teachers

Teachers in public-sector primary and secondary schools are state civil servants recruited by competitive examination open to holders of a *licence* (obtained three years after the baccalaureate) or, in the case of the *agrégation*, a *maîtrise* (four years after the baccalaureate), or any qualification regarded as equivalent. Preparation for these examinations is provided for those who so wish by the *instituts universitaires de formation des maîtres* (IUFMs). Successful performance in the examination is followed by a compulsory year's training for the teaching profession, which combines theoretical work at an IUFM with practical placements. Teachers in private schools are recruited by means of special competitive examinations, and then employed on an individual basis in accordance with either public law contracts – as part of a *contrat d'association* – or private law, even though their remuneration is paid by the State.

II. Trend in France towards internationalisation of its institutions and their participation in construction of an European area.

1) Developing European harmonisation

The declarations of the Sorbonne (25 May 1998) and Bologna (29 June 1999) laid the foundations of European policy to align higher education systems. During their summit meeting in Berlin on 19 September, the education ministers of the 33 countries agreed to “*coordinate their policies*” with a view to promoting “*a system of understandable, comparable diplomas*”, “*improving the recognition system of degrees and periods of studies*” and in order to encourage student and teacher mobility, they agreed to harmonise the length of studies.

Further to the 33 countries currently part of the Bologna Process, seven countries decided to join in : Albania, Andorra, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Vatican, Serbia and Montenegro, “the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” and, last but not least, Russia. With Russia coming on board, the European higher education area will be doubling in size.

To implement this policy, France will have definitively completed to introduce the system of modules and semesters in higher education and to impose a « *credit system* » compatible with ECTS by 2006. France has laid down regulations to create a higher education architecture based on three levels: the degree, the Master and the doctorate :

The Vocational Degree

The ministerial decision dated April 23 2002 on university studies leading to the degree is based on two goals:

- application of the principles selected for construction of the European higher education area to the degree courses,
- definition of a regulatory framework enabling universities to submit innovative courses, not least pluri-disciplinary and fostering professional skills, for national recognition.

This course is offered in initial and continuing education; it is the fruit of close partnership between institutions and the business world. It also enhances the potential of the European credit system.

The national Master diploma

This new diploma also falls under the regulations which form the French construction of the European higher education area. The Master diploma gives universities a framework in which to organise studies after the degree by offering courses corresponding to 120 European credits after the degree. The Master courses include a range of subjects within a single field of training, enabling progressive guidance of students either into a vocational choice with a vocational Master, or in a research field with a research Master. These courses are designed to attract foreign students too.

The grade of Master was automatically awarded as of 1999 to students holding a DEA, DESS or engineering diploma, and since 2002, holding a Master diploma. It is also awarded in Grandes Ecoles and may be awarded to holders of other diplomas of the same level, listed by the Minister for higher education. It requires national "*habilitation*" based on periodical assessments in the framework of the contractual policy.

Student mobility

The common architecture of diplomas based on the degree and pre- and post master studies, and the spread of the ECTS credit system enable an ambitious mobility policy to be implemented. This supposes improved linguistic and cultural preparation of students, as well as stepped up participation in EC mobility programmes such as Socrates and Leonardo. It will provide for more use of a range of tools and procedures such as recognition of previous acquisitions of knowledge or experience and validation of study periods abroad, double diplomas and integrated courses, development and acknowledgement of outplacements in other countries, European doctoral exchanges and the development of double thesis direction, and finally, the organisation of European summer schools.

In that context, french universities have associated with their European partners to set up :

- « integrated courses», which will enable students to follow their studies in two or three institutions in the partner countries and obtain their diplomas from their home university,
- « joint thesis direction», with the financial backing of the Ministry of National Education, enabling doctoral students to work with two research directors and present their theses before joint panels comprising members of both universities, and obtain a doctorate signed and recognised by the partners in both countries.

Furthermore, the creation of bi-national universities should be mentioned. These institutions "without walls" aim to promote courses followed partly in the university of origin and partly in the partner university. At this time there are two bi-national universities: the Franco-German university and the Franco-Italian university. The Franco-German university took over the tasks of the Franco-German College, widening them to adapt them to the level of university courses. The new courses it has initiated are sanctioned by a Franco-German diploma, which is a highly significant advance in the field of university co-operation. Thus, almost 5,000 students followed 300 integrated courses in France and Germany in 2005, under the aegis of the Franco-German university

The expansion of the European summer schools is one of the measures of the Plan of Action for mobility to step up exchanges and co-operation, adopted at the Nice European Summit in December 2000. These, steered by higher education institutions in partnership with local authorities and cultural institutions, saw their number growing: there are now over 80 sites, compared to 12 in 2000, and they offer courses to over 5,000 students. The summer schools, offering a more flexible and convivial sort of mobility, complement the existing European

programmes. They receive the authorisation “label” of the Ministry of National Education to ensure quality and promote and advertise them.

2) Ensuring the internationalisation of research

Excellence in research is sought by research teams recognised by national contracts and internationally. Various international operations undertaken by doctoral schools in higher education institutions as well as in research organisations may promote French research outside french borders. The development of internationalisation in Doctoral Schools may involve:

- a strategy for welcoming foreign doctoral and post-doctoral researchers,
- continued development of jointly directed thesis,
- European or international doctoral networks.

International co-operation between research units may be based on joint international laboratories, for example, or on European or international research-training networks of excellence. European co-operation may be achieved by the PCRD, a privileged framework in which to strengthen research and development which can be used by institutions seeking to foster determined implication on the part of their research teams.

3) Enhancing the attraction of French institutions internationally

French institutions must be capable of playing their role in international competition to the full. This means:

- implementation of an information policy on institutions’ educational offer (modern information tools and supports, websites in foreign languages, participation in foreign promotions and exhibitions, not least those initiated by Edufrance),
- implementation of a proper welcoming and accompaniment policy for foreign students, teachers and researchers (a service package including open days, administrative and educational follow up, assistance with installation problems, various forms of tutoring, and follow up of former foreign students),
- creation of specific training products adapted to foreign demand, especially distance education.

The Edufrance agency was created by the Ministries of National Education and Foreign Affairs in November 1998 to:

- promote France’s educational and academic expertise potential throughout the world,
- offer foreign students an overall service for their reception and stay in France,
- co-ordinate the French offer in educational engineering.

The agency’s action is based on a French diplomatic and university network abroad. In France, the agency is gradually spreading its action by setting up partnerships with various directorates in the ministries involved and organisations vested with duties involving the international dimension of education and research.

III Foreign students wishing to study in France

Each year, almost 150,000 young people from all over the world come to France to study. They choose France because the French higher education system has a number of features that make it very successful and attractive. In particular, a wide range of institutions is available: universities, "grandes écoles", and specialist schools. They choose France because of its high

level of cultural and technological development, its modernity and also because of the quality of life France offers.

Foreign students may enter any of the French higher education institutions

a) Enrolment procedures

They differ according to whether the institution at which the foreign student wishes to register is a university, one of the "grandes écoles" or a specialist school, and according to the degree that he or she already holds and the level at which he or she wishes to pursue a course of study.

To enrol in a university in France applicant must have a diploma showing an achieved level of secondary school education equivalent to the French baccalaureate. There is no selection for entry into university. However, the procedure is not the same for all foreign students: some students can enrol directly (EU residents), while others must comply with pre-inscription requirements. In both cases, they must take a language test and pay particular attention to complete the application formalities at the required dates.

A foreign student wishing to enrol in a higher education program should find out about possible courses and the relevant enrolment procedures by contacting the cultural attaché of the French embassy or consulate in his or her own country.

b) Possible financial assistance

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs gives study grants to foreign students wishing to study in France in the framework of specific programmes directly under its Paris departments (General directorate for international co-operation and development, Under-directorate for academic and scientific co-operation, and Bureau for foreign scholars in France). These grants are managed by two organisations :

- CNOUS (National centre for University and School assistance), under-directorate for foreign grant beneficiaries and international affairs (SDBEAI),
- The French centre for international students and exchanges (EGIDE).

Furthermore, two grant programmes are designed to attract the best foreign students :

- The « Eiffel » grants for excellence, designed for the best foreign students wishing to follow their higher education in France at second and third cycle level in engineering, economics, business studies, law or political sciences,
- The « Major » grants for excellence, which enables former pupils of *French Lycées* abroad, holding a French baccalauréat and who have passed their first cycle examinations to study for three further years at university or in a grande école and obtain the grade of master (baccalauréat plus five years). Eighty to a hundred grants are offered each year under this programme, a total of 250 to 300 over the full cycle.

Depending on their nationality or status, some foreign students may also apply for funding from the French Ministry of National Education. An annual guide is published by the National Association of Doctors of Science (ANDES) with the backing of the various ministries concerned, for foreign students wishing to find out about funding for doctoral and post-doctoral studies.

All information on these grant programmes is available by contacting the Cultural Attaché of the French embassy or consulate.

c) Academic guidance services in universities

There are joint university services for the reception, guidance and professional integration of students (SCUIO) set up in each university. The role of the SCUIOs is to receive, inform, and guide students and take steps to ensure professional integration. The SCUIOs are parts of the "Euroguidance Network" which actively promotes mobility within Europe, particularly for people undergoing initial vocational training or lifelong learning. It operates by forming a contact network for the guidance services of Europe, exchanging quality careers information and answering individual enquiries. Organised by university teachers with the assistance of researchers, and guidance counsellors, the SCUIOs offer a range of services from simple documentary research to individual counselling, thus helping the student to adapt to university.

IV The French Digital Campuses

The French open distance learning sites in higher or continuing education and training offer complete catalogues of available courses, forums for the sharing of information and ideas, information on research and teaching tools, on-line news section, as well as details of all the training courses provided by the education institutions. Visitors can consult conventional paper-based or on-line programmes, individual modules or complete courses, as well as finding out how to enrol in an institution and keeping up to date with new developments in open distance learning in France

The integration of some innovative technology trends has brought many institutions of higher education in France to move steadily toward the digital campus of tomorrow. Digital campuses are now the most dynamic examples of new forms of open and distance learning in France. Although their primary objective is national in scope, they were designed from the very beginning to also meet the needs and expectations of France's partners abroad. There are currently about fifty foreign institutions outside of France that are directly involved in digital campus consortiums.

In 2000, the French Ministries of Education and Research, out of a concern to preserve the excellence of French higher education and to modernise it, launched a Project for the construction of "French Digital Campuses". These campuses are intended to offer open distance post-baccalaureate training, using new technologies, in all fields for clearly identified target audiences. All of the major disciplines are covered by this new range of training programmes : science and technology, medicine, the humanities and social sciences, educational engineering and information and communication technologies. Both initial training and continuing education are involved.

The Digital campuses not only allow learners to access training programmes from any location, far or near, but also allow them to progress at their own pace at chosen periods throughout their lifetimes.

They consist in modular training programmes, responsive to well-identified needs, with individualised programmes combining the use of multimedia resources, interactive digital environments, along with the human and administrative supervision necessary for learning and validation.

Training programmes are available in versions ranging from traditional classroom situations enriched by the use of ICT, to programmes that rely entirely on distance learning techniques,

depending on the course of study and the needs and objectives of the learners or the students.

Digital campuses rely on a spirit of co-operation, which must be open and innovative in all regards. This co-operative effort implies a certain number of major challenges that must be dealt with, particularly with regard to providing a regulatory framework for the operation. In that regard, the French educational institutions and Ministries involved in the Project “French Digital Campuses” have implemented the necessary framework to :

- Define a set of norms and standards. Shared norms and standards are needed for diversified educational programmes and those shared amongst several institutions, particularly with regard to validating the skills acquired by students. The teaching model via modules is based on the European system for the transfer of academic credits (ECTS),
- Develop a suitable legal and regulatory framework. The shared ownership of content and educational programmes amongst multiple partners with very diverse situations and subject to different laws when foreign partners are involved, requires that proponents of change define the legal and regulatory framework most favourable to the modernisation of education, within the new context of international co-operation.

V Effective pathways for transition and life long learning

Recognition of competencies apart from initial education is linked to the notion, which is spreading in France, that our society is based on a “knowing culture” which enhances lifelong orientation and education.

The objective of the French system of recognition of competencies is to identify and validate achievements from social as well as working life. This process of recognition is divided into two main stages :

1) Competence Audit

The personal and occupational competencies of workers are evaluated through *a bilan de competence* (competence audit). This allows the recognition of attainments gained outside the educational system. The “Bilan de compétences” is the property of the person concerned and determines the current state of the individual's competence, both in a personal and occupational sense.

More than 100 CIBSs or "Centres interinstitutionnelles de bilans de compétences" (Inter-institutional centres for competence audit) offer anyone who wishes to have a competence audit drawn up. To do this, they provide interdisciplinary teams, drawing together specialists in counselling, training and employment. Since their inception, the CIBCs have provided a platform for experimentation in the techniques of the bilan. The CIBC also played an important role in bringing together a number of important education and training partners; the national Ministry of Education, the Association for the Vocational Training of Adults (AFPA), the National Agency for Employment (ANPE) and sometimes chambers of commerce and Industry. Each of the 97 French “départements” has at least one CIBC.

A rather complex set of objectives may be identified within the system, differing according to the various target groups involved. Adults facing redundancy, women wishing to return to work, young people without qualifications and unemployed adults are all "target groups" addressed by the initiators of the bilan. The process of compiling the portfolio of competencies, which results from the "bilan" procedure, is in itself viewed as a learning

experience. The actual competence audit consists of three phases. A preliminary phase which is intended to lead the candidate to define and analyse his or her needs, during which full information of the methods and techniques should be given. An investigation phase which should help the candidate to state his or her values, interests and aspirations, general and occupational knowledge, skills and aptitude and identify his motivation. A concluding phase in the form of personal interviews where the aim is to review the details of the results with the candidate. The agent offering a bilan then draws up a summary, but only the candidate has the right to pass it on to a third party. This illustrates the complexity of the process: The portfolio should list the significant competencies acquired by the holder (the aspect of identification), the portfolio should develop or reinforce the holder's awareness of the competencies acquired (the aspect of motivation) and, finally, the portfolio should assist the holder to convince others of his or her special qualities (the market aspect).

2) Validation of experiment assets

Experiential attainments can be accredited for the award of a diploma or credit towards a diploma.

A new law (January 2002) has created the possibility for every person, whatever his age, level of education, status, who has at least 3 years of activity (fulltime or part time activities) on the same job, to ask for a validation of one's experience (professional and extra-professional) to obtain a degree (with the same value that those obtained only by education) which is mentioned in the "National Registry of the Professional Certifications (RNCP). In France, this whole process is called Recognition of competencies apart from initial education is linked to the notion, which is spreading in France, that our society is based on a "knowing culture" which enhances lifelong orientation and education.

The certification body is the national commission on professional certifications (CNCP), created within the frame of the January 2002 Social Law. The committee includes the representatives of the 14 ministries, social partners with half employers and half employees, the representatives of education and orientation sectors, representatives of teachers and representatives of regions.

All professional diplomas, titles, and certificates must be included in the registry. The following types of qualification may also be obtained through the job experience validation programme as long as they are part of the National Registry and provided that there is no regulation prohibiting use of the programme (for health, safety, or national defence reasons, in particular) for a particular qualification :

- Diplomas or professional degrees awarded by the State,
- Diplomas awarded on behalf of the State by institutions of higher education,
- Degrees conferred by consular or private training organisations,
- Joint qualification certificates.

The Registry aims to provide anyone who wishes to earn credit for past experience with a precise idea of which qualifications may be obtained, by providing reliable, current information on the available professional certifications and by making the certification system easier to understand.

Skills eligible for credit include all professional skills acquired through paid, unpaid, or volunteer work, provided the individual seeking credit has at least three years of relevant work experience, whether continuous or not. The accreditation jury then evaluates the professional nature of the skills acquired and their relationship to the skills required by the

course of study corresponding to the desired diploma or certificate. The jury may also consider higher education-level studies done abroad.

When candidates applying for job experience validation know which type of certification they would like to obtain, they may apply directly to the institution or organisation awarding the certificate within previously set and publicly announced conditions and deadlines. Application procedures, supporting documents to be submitted by candidates, and criteria for acceptability are established by decree, either by the relevant ministries for diplomas or degrees awarded by the state, or at the discretion of the organisation awarding certification.

Applicants are eligible to receive guidance in preparing their accreditation files. The counsellor's role is to help the applicant describe work performed and identify links between skills acquired and the skills required for the desired certification. The counsellor provides the applicant with support in analysing past work experience in order to describe it in terms that will facilitate validation. If the counsellor feels that the applicant's professional skills are not sufficient to meet the requirements of the desired certification, he must inform the applicant. However, it is the applicant's decision whether to complete the application process or not.

This recognition of experience represents a window of opportunity for workers with few or no educational qualifications and who have limited access to professional training (29% of white-collar workers and 20% of blue-collar workers complete at least one training course per year, compared with 54% of executives and 45% of engineers). VAE can foster the development of individual skills training, and be a springboard for promotion at work.

Companies welcome the fact that workers gain an opportunity to broaden knowledge acquired through work and that the role of the workplace in skills acquisition can be acknowledged. As part of a skills-based management programme, VAE is likely to transform human resources management and general management practices, as well as work organisation. It allows for an increase in staff qualification levels, a clear picture of in-house competencies, and certification for competencies within a framework of quality standards. The development of competencies should, therefore, be a joint responsibility between the employee and the company.

Three main factors explain the coherence of the French system. Firstly, the introduction of the system is based on a comprehensive co-operation between the social partners and the public authorities. A period of testing and negotiation between the partners preceded the legal formalisation of the system. Secondly, but of course related to the first point made, the strong legal base developed through several decades must be considered. The "unit credit" system developed since 1963 is fundamental to the French validation system. It allows candidates to take one part or all of a diploma, each unit remains valid for five years.

Standards in accordance with information supplied by the occupational sector define the competencies to be achieved. The system has been strengthened and complemented several times. The Law of 23 August 1985 permits the validation of professional competencies acquired outside formal education. The Law of December 1991 states that workers have the right to have a bilan. The initiative may come from the employer (as part of enterprise training budget) as well as from the worker him or herself (who is entitled to an educational leave for the purpose of gaining a bilan, "Le congé pour bilan de compétences"). The Law of 22. July 1992 provided for the validation of prior and informal skills within the national framework of diplomas and certificates, and thus recognises the legal equality in status between

competencies acquired inside and outside formal education. Thirdly, the strong institutional basis is important to the system.

VI Useful Contacts and addresses in France

The information contained in the above sections are extracted from the following resources :

French Ministry of Education

The French government's online education information resource centre :

www.education.gouv.fr

Recognition of diplomas in France and in Europe :

www.education.gouv.fr/int/euro6.htm#top

Edufrance

Agency created by the Ministries of National Education and Foreign Affairs in November 1998 to:

- promote France's educational and academic expertise potential throughout the world,
- offer foreign students an overall service for their reception and stay in France, co-ordinate the French offer in educational engineering.

Agence EduFrance

173, boulevard

Saint-Germain

75006 PARIS - France

Tel: 0033 1 53 63 35 00

Fax: 0033 1 53 63 35 49

www.edufrance.fr

ONISEP

National Office for Information on Education and Careers, ONISEP aims to develop and make available comprehensive documentation about training, education resources, employment and jobs in France.

ONISEP

44, rue Alphonse Penaud

75020 Paris, France

Tel: 0033 1 44 62 35 40

Fax: 0033 1 44 62 35 39

www.onisep.fr

www.onisep.fr/national/etudiants_etr/html/francais/decouvrir_esup.htm

Centre INFFO

co-ordinates information and documentation on continuing vocational education and training, edits and publishes periodicals, information documents, technical files and other information tools. Centre Inffo provides information on the initiatives and operations of international, national and regional institutions, organises study and information days, realises inquiries and studies for bodies or for companies.

Centre Inffo
4, avenue du Stade-de-France
93218 Saint-Denis-La Plaine, France
Tel: 0033 1 55 93 91 91
Fax : .0033 1 55 93 17 25
www.centre-inffo.fr

SCUIO / Academic guidance services

Joint university services for the reception, guidance and professional integration of students.
www.onisep.fr/national/adressesutiles/html/cadre_adresses_orga.htm

Euroguidance France

European network of National Resource Centres for Vocational Guidance, promoting mobility in Europe and Developing the European feeling in guidance activities.
www.euroguidance-france.org/euroguidance/indexuk.htm

CNOUS (Centre National des Oeuvres Universitaires et Scolaires)

The CNOUS and its 28 regional centres, the CROUS, have been created to ameliorate the living and working conditions of students. The CROUS offer cheap meals in university restaurants, subsidised housing accommodation, social and cultural services, as well as temporary jobs.

CNOUS
69 quai Orsay
75007 Paris, France
Tel: 0033 1 44 18 53 00
Fax: 0033 1 45 55 48 49
www.cnous.fr

EGIDE

The French centre for international mobility and exchanges.
Égide is a non-profit organisation whose main role is to manage the logistical, administrative and financial aspects of educational trips to France for foreign students, researchers and professionals.

Égide
28 rue de la Grange aux Belles
75010 Paris, France
Tel: 0033 1 40 40 58
Fax: 0033 1 42 0070 08
www.egide.asso.fr

NARIC network (National Academic Recognition Information Centres)

Created in 1984, the network aims at improving academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study in the Member States of the European Union, the European Economic Area and Central and Eastern European countries. Naric is associated with the ENIC network (European Network of Information Centres) which is made up of national information centres. The role of these centres is to provide information and advice on:

- the recognition of foreign diplomas, degrees and other academic or professional qualifications,
- education systems in other European countries and one's own country,

- opportunities for studying abroad, including information on loans and scholarships, as well as on practical questions related to mobility.

www.enic-naric.net

FIED (Inter-university federation for Distance Learning)

The FIED (Fédération Interuniversitaire de l'Enseignement à Distance) is an association made up of academic institutions interested in distance learning in all of its forms. It serves as the country-wide co-ordinator for the activities of 25 universities, most of which have their own distance learning centres (CTEU). The FIED ensures, on behalf of France and its universities, that these centres are represented within the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU): <http://telesup.univ-mrs.fr/htm/fied.htm>

The European Association of Distance Teaching Universities

EADTU is the representative organisation of both the European open and distance learning universities and of the national consortia of higher education institutions active in the field of distance education and e-learning. Therefore it is the main voice of the community for open and distance higher education and e-learning in Europe : www.eadtu.nl

Formasup

The open distance learning site for higher education supported by the French Ministry of Education. Formasup offers a complete catalogue of available courses, a forum for the sharing of information and ideas, information on research and teaching tools, as well as a wide-ranging on-line news section. Formasup has details of all the training courses provided by higher education institutions such as the National Distance Learning Centre (CNED – www.cned.fr) and the Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers (CNAM – www.cnam.fr) : www.formasup.education.fr

CNEFAD (Centre National d'Enseignement et de Formation à Distance)

The Cnefad is a branch of AFPA (French national Association for Adult Vocational Training). Cnefad provides at distance supplementary vocational courses for persons who may find themselves lacking basic knowledge in the subjects they wish to pursue. To make up this shortcoming, supplementary courses are available in almost all the vocational training sectors : www.cnefad.com
