



**National summary sheets on
education systems in Europe
and ongoing reforms**

2007 Edition



FRANCE

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1. Education population and language of instruction

At the beginning of the 2006/07 academic year, the school population in metropolitan France and its overseas *départements* (DOM) for public and private sectors stood at 12 400 000 students. In order for the education system to operate, the state employs more than 1 300 000 people, 850 000 of whom are public-sector teachers. There are almost 2 287 000 students in higher education, which employs 147 000 people, 88 000 of whom are teachers in public higher education institutions. 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 minister 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. The number of students in the private sector has remained stable for several years, at 2 027 700 (primary and secondary education, 2006).

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, 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 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 regional groups: *communes* for primary education, *départements* for *collèges* and *régions* for *lycées*. 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 regional 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 5
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France has a long tradition of 'pre-elementary' education. Despite the fact that it is not compulsory, all children attend the *école maternelle* (nursery school) from the age of 2 onwards. 'Pre-elementary' education is available for all children aged 2 to 5 regardless of their nationality, though provision to children aged 2 is based on availability.

Public-sector 'pre-elementary' or 'nursery' schools are the responsibility of the education ministry and attendance at them is free of charge. In the private schools that cater for close to 2.4% of children, parents pay a share of the tuition fees. 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 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 '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 so-called *professeurs certifiés* in secondary education (see 8.).

4. Compulsory education

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

(i) Phases

Primary education	Ages 6-11
Lower secondary education (<i>collège</i>)	Ages 11-15
General and technological <i>lycée</i> or vocational <i>lycée</i>	Compulsory between ages 15 and 16

(ii) 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.

(iii) Length of 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. Measures can be taken at district level, however, to modify this calendar and discontinue Saturday morning classes in certain schools or *collèges*. 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.

(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 is an inconsistency 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) Curriculum 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, 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 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.

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. At the beginning of the 2006/07 academic year, the 11 July 2006 decree came into effect regarding the common core of skills and knowledge (see part II). To verify whether pupils have accomplished the first elements of knowledge and skills defined in the common core, an evaluation of reading, writing and mathematics skills at the beginning of CE1 has been implemented, and was conducted for the first time in October 2006.

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, 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.

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

(i) Types of education

<i>Lycée d'enseignement général et technologique</i>	Ages 16-18
<i>Lycée professionnel</i>	Ages 16-17/19

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

- general studies;
- technological studies;
- vocational training.

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 and technological baccalaureate examination.

Only on completion of the 'second' class common to all pupils do the latter choose 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 years (in the first and final vocational classes) for a vocational baccalaureate in one of 48 specialised fields on offer.

(ii) Admissions criteria

See 4 (ii) above.

(iii) Curriculum 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 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* 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 penultimate and final-year classes, the list of compulsory subjects and time devoted to them depend on how they are grouped.

The vocational *lycées* 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*, or CPC).

(iv) 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).

In *lycées professionnels*, students' preparation for qualifications at two levels 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 are geared to the continuation of further studies, the vocational baccalaureate is primarily intended to provide direct access to employment.

6. Higher education

(i) Structure

Higher education 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 studies;
- *classes préparatoires aux grandes écoles* (CPGE), offered in *lycées*;
- studies at *grandes écoles*;
- *sections de techniciens supérieurs* (STS);
- studies at *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 studies, 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 higher 'schools', normally known as *grandes écoles*;
- those which may be accessed via a selection procedure usually after obtaining a *licence*: studies at *instituts universitaires de formation des maîtres* (IUFM).

(iii) Qualifications

The implementation of the LMD reform, which gears 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;
- 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 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 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), 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. Access to the profession for **all levels of education** takes place by means of a competitive examination, followed by a practical placement which must be validated by a certificate of competency (CERPE, CAPES, CAPEPS, CAPLP, CAPET, CRCPE 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 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; second-degree 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; part-time lecturers and part-time staff.

9. Current reforms and priorities

The current priorities of the ministry responsible for national education are conveyed in a series of measures in accordance with the *Loi d'orientation et de programme pour l'avenir de l'école* of 23 April 2005. This involves, in particular:

Defining the common core

The education system must provide each student with the necessary means to acquire a 'common core' of knowledge and skills which are essential in order to do well at school, continue one's studies, build one's personal and professional future and succeed in life and society.

The common core, established by the 11 July 2006 decree, is divided into seven categories. It represents the new reference for drafting national curricula. Students' proficiency in the common core will be assessed regularly. Furthermore, thanks to the common core, the content of compulsory education has been officially defined at national level for the first time since Jules Ferry.

The seven major skills that schools undertake to impart are:

- proficiency in French;
- knowledge of a foreign language;
- background in mathematics and science;
- openness towards information technologies;
- knowledge of the humanities;

- social and civic skills;
- independence and initiative.

Programmes personnalisés de réussite éducative (PPRE)

Programmes personnalisés de réussite éducative (PPRE, or personalised academic achievement programmes) will be implemented to benefit pupils who do not meet the requirements of the common core. PPRE is an individualised project which refines the types of support available at school and at home. It allows the progress of pupils to be assessed regularly.

Continuity will be ensured by a 'record of skills' kept by educational teams accompanied by inspectorates. This tool will chart each pupil's development from primary school on, and will allow them to know their initial level and the objectives they must set in order to acquire the common core of skills and knowledge.

In the 'priority education' areas, these measures are combined with existing measures.

Revival of priority education

The priority education policy, implemented in 1981, aims at repairing the effects of social, economic and cultural inequality by reinforcing educational efforts where school failure rates are the highest.

In 2006, this policy was relaunched with new foundations following serious disruptions of public order in autumn 2005 in some underprivileged neighbourhoods. The objectives of priority education have been redefined and resources have been redistributed in order to 'give more to those who need more'.

The relaunch strategy involves several levels of action. For priority education as a whole, a *collège* becomes the unit of reference for the network it forms with the primary and pre-primary schools which were previously attended by its pupils. Based on this model, the existing networks of priority education are structured into two types of network: 1) 249 'headed for success' networks, and 2) the other 'academic success' networks.

The first type of network (level EP1) is made up of schools and *collèges* whose pupils face the biggest academic and social difficulties. In 2006-2007, they benefit from additional resources, including 1 000 teachers and 3 000 teaching assistants.

The second type of network (levels EP2 and EP3) includes institutions characterised by a greater social mix than those at EP1 level. These institutions will continue to receive the same support. Level EP3 concerns *collèges* which are expected to leave the priority education system gradually over three years if they meet the conditions.

Giving marks for school life

Teaching pupils to have a sense of civic responsibility is one of the major challenges for the education system. *La note de vie scolaire* (giving marks for school life) is part of this educational approach which concerns all aspects of schooling at *collège*. It becomes an element of pupil evaluation in itself, as well as for the award of the *diplôme national du brevet* (national certificate). It is intended to reinforce the value of positive attitudes towards school and others. Like all marking systems, it also evaluates a pupil's progress throughout the academic year.

The development of learning

The development of learning is a government priority within the framework of the policy for the commitment to employment and social cohesion. The government plan is to increase the total number of apprentices over the next five years from 370 000 to 500 000, involving the participation of all contributors to these streams of study, in particular national education. The objective is to increase the number of young people who undergo apprenticeship training in *collèges* and *lycées*, as well as in

établissements publics régionaux d'enseignement adapté (EREA, for pupils with disabilities), by 50 % before 2010.

Introductory courses may be offered, in particular to pupils over the age of 14 who make the request (junior apprenticeship), in *lycées professionnels* and *centres de formation d'apprentis* (CFA). They would allow these pupils to acquire the common core of skills and knowledge and at the same time learn about the different trades at school and through practical placements.

Improving education for disabled pupils

Actions to improve education for disabled pupils by the ministry responsible for national education are reinforced by the 11 February 2005 law concerning equal rights and opportunities and the participation and citizenship of disabled people. This law has been in force since 1 January 2006, and asserts the right of disabled pupils to education, as well as the responsibility of the education system to guarantee continuity in schooling for all pupils.

Apart from exceptions related to special needs, a disabled pupil attends the school closest to his or her home, referred to as his or her 'reference institution'. Regardless of the educational methods used, a **personalised education project** sets out the learning objectives of the disabled pupil and ensures the coherence and quality of support based on a global assessment of the situation and the pupil's needs. It is aimed at increasing the number of disabled pupils who move on to higher education, as well as improving accessibility to vocational training. Therefore, from the beginning of the 2006/07 academic year, all disabled pupils have a **reference teacher** (17 August 2006 order) who will accompany them throughout their studies.

Furthermore, 200 new *unités pédagogiques d'intégration* (UPI, official name for all collective integration measures created in *collèges* and *lycées* for disabled pupils) have been set up.

In particular, an experimental plan will be implemented in some *lycées généraux et technologiques* to benefit pupils with hearing impairments who would like to learn French sign language beginning in the 'second class'. This experiment falls within the scope of the progressive implementation of the right to bilingual communication stipulated in article L. 112-2-2 of the Education Code.

Teacher training

Teacher training is an important responsibility which the state has bestowed on universities since their integration of *Instituts Universitaires de Formation des Maîtres* (IUFM) during the 2006/07 academic year. On 19 December 2006, an order was issued concerning the specifications for teacher training, defining the curriculum for IUFM students. It will come into force at the beginning of the 2007/08 academic year, based on the 11 July 2006 decree defining the common core of skills and knowledge, orders establishing the curricula, as well as circulars, memoranda and other official texts specifying the educational commitments of institutions. The specifications include **10 professional skills** which must be acquired by intending teachers:

- Ethical and responsible behaviour as a state employee;
- Proficiency in the French language for teaching and communicating;
- Proficiency in all subjects taught and good general knowledge;
- Subject planning and teaching;
- Organisation of classroom work;
- Respect for the diversity of pupils;
- Pupil assessment;

- Thorough knowledge of information and communication technologies;
- Teamwork and cooperation with parents and school partners;
- Ongoing training and innovation.

They cover, in particular, **the principles of teacher training**, emphasising the importance of professional training with practical placements and periodic assessment, ensuring proficiency in all professional skills.

Finally, the specifications define the **2 main missions of a host school, *collège* or *lycée*** for trainee and new teachers. This involves creating an environment of support for trainee and new teachers, guiding them in their mission as state employees, and facilitating the use of their disciplinary and teaching skills in all aspects. It also refers to the active role of those involved (school head, head teachers, professors at teacher training institutions, reference teachers, teachers who work with trainees, instructors, teachers and trainees): everyone must participate according to their abilities.

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