

France:Overview

The French education system is characterised by **strong State presence in the organisation and funding of Education**. The State defines the details of curricula at all education levels; it organises the teachers' admissions procedure, defines content, recruits teachers who become civil servants, provides them with in-service training; it recruits and trains [inspectors](#), responsible for controlling the quality of the education system; it is the main funding body of the public education system and subsidises "[private schools under contract](#)" which receive approximately 20% of school pupils.

Education is compulsory between the ages of 6 and 16 years. However, France has a **long tradition of pre-primary education**: for the past twenty years, almost all children attend nursery school from the age of three, even though it is optional; it is therefore an integral part of the French education system and falls under the responsibility of the [Department for National Education](#) which sets the curricula.

French pupils tend to specialise quite late on: since a 1975 Act, they are taught the same subjects until the age of 15 within a "*collège unique*" (ISCED 2). The first stage of specialisation occurs at the end of *collège* (lower secondary education): pupils are streamed to attend either a [general and technological lycées](#) or a [professional lycées](#). Both types of school prepare pupils to take the [baccalauréat](#) in three years, marking the end of secondary education: pupils who pass it obtain the State-issued baccalauréat diploma (general, technological or vocational) which opens up access to higher education and entitles them to enrol at university.

Higher education is characterised by the coexistence of two systems: universities, - public institutions that have an open admissions policy, except for [instituts universitaires de technologie](#) (IUT - technological university institutes) or [classes préparatoires intégrées](#) (integrated preparatory classes) - and a non-university sector, including, in particular, [Grandes Ecoles](#) (Elite Schools), with a highly selective admissions policy open to [baccalauréat](#) holders having attended two years of classes préparatoires, themselves highly selective on entry and during the course.

The French education system is organised into several **levels of education**:

- [Pre-primary education](#) (ISCED 0)*, which is dispensed at "nursery schools" and take children from 2/3 up to 6 years of age. Almost all children attend nursery school from the age of three, even though it is optional. Such schools therefore form - together with the elementary level - an integral part of the French "primary level of education", which is under the aegis of the Department for National Education.
- [Primary education](#) (ISCED 1), which is provided in "elementary schools" and admits children between the ages of 6 and 11. It marks the start of compulsory schooling, and is secular and free of charge when dispensed in State schools. At the end of this 5-year-course, pupils automatically access to the secondary level of education (there is neither standardised tests nor guidance procedures).
- [Lower secondary education](#) (ISCED 2), which is provided in [collèges](#) for 4 school years (pupils between the ages of 11 and 15 years). Education in [collèges](#) is compulsory and common to all pupils. A national diploma (the [brevet](#)) is awarded at the end of *collège* schooling. Admission to upper secondary level is not conditional upon success in the brevet. At the end of *collège* schooling (15 year-old pupils), the school recommends the appropriate scholastic path to families, basing its recommendation on the pupil's school reports and particular interests. Children will continue their schooling either in general, technological or professional education, provided at upper secondary level.
- [Upper secondary education](#) (ISCED 3), which is dispensed in "[general and technological lycées](#)" or in "[professional lycées](#)", which extends over 3 years (pupils between the ages of 15 and 18 years). Upper secondary education provides three educational paths: general path (which prepares pupils for long-term higher studies), technological path (which mainly prepares pupils for higher technological studies) and professional path (which leads mainly to active working life, but also enables students to continue their studies in higher education). A national diploma is awarded at the end of secondary schooling: the [baccalauréat](#). It which is both a sign of successful completion of secondary studies and the first step in university education, access to higher studies being conditional upon its obtention. Pupils at professional lycées can prepare the CAP ([Certificat d'aptitude professionnelle](#)), a course of study extending over 2 years, after what they can either integrate active working life or prepare the [professional baccalauréat](#) after 2 additional years of studies.
- [Higher education](#) (ISCED 5 and ISCED 6), which is dispensed in higher educational institutions. These institutions have a wide variety of legal statuses that are listed in the French Code of Education (book VII). Courses dispensed at these institutions have different aims and conditions for admission, but most of them are structured into three study cycles (Bachelor's degree, Master's degree and Doctorate) and in [ECTS credits](#), in compliance with the principles of the [Bologna Process](#).

In 2011, the French education system provided schooling for around **15 million pupils, students and apprentices** (representing about 23% of the national population); the **total budget was of 134.7 billion euro**, in 2011 (the equivalent of 6.9% of the Gross Domestic Product). (MEN-DEPP, [The state of Education, 2012](#))

The official language for education is French.

At central level, the French education system is regulated by two departments: the [Department for National Education](#) - which

oversees the school system - and the [Department for Higher Education and Research](#) - which is responsible for higher education and research. They govern within the framework defined by the Parliament, which states the fundamental principles of education ([law no. 89-486 of 10 July 1989](#), the [law no. 2005-380 of 23 April 2005](#) and the [law no 2013-595 of 8 July 2013](#)). **The State plays a major role in governance**, as, by long tradition, the French education system is centralised. Nevertheless, at local level, and since the start of a process of decentralisation of competences in the administration of the educational system in the 1980s, [local authorities](#) have been playing an increasingly significant part in governance, ensuring the material operation of the system (construction and maintenance of school buildings, school transport, supply of educational materials, etc.).

For further information, please consult the introduction articles of [Organisation and Governance](#) and of each educational level: [Early Childhood Education](#), [Primary Education](#), [Secondary Education and Post Secondary Non Tertiary Education](#), [Higher Education](#) and [Adult Education and Training](#).

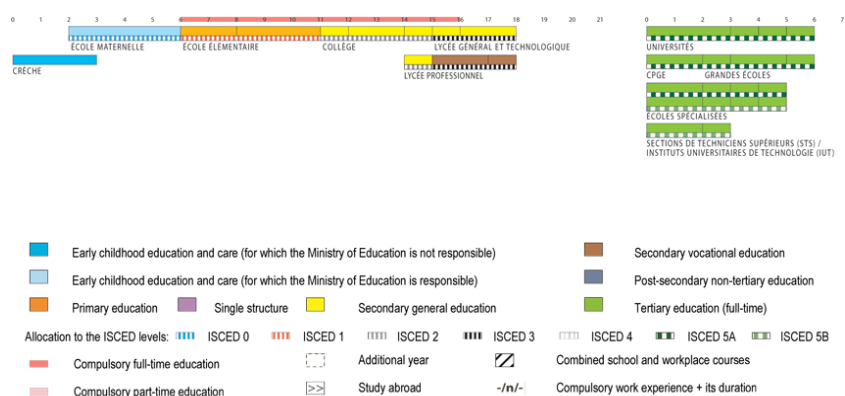
For a brief description of other main topics regarding the national education system, please read the introduction article of [Funding Education](#), [Teachers and education staff](#), [Management and other educational staff](#), [Educational Support and Guidance](#), [Quality Assurance](#), [Mobility and Internationalisation](#).

For information on recently adopted or planned reforms and policy measures, please consult topic [Ongoing Reforms and Policy Developpements](#).

While Eurypedia provides comprehensive and comparable information, further information may also be found on the websites of the Department for Education, Youth and Community Life ([Eduscol](#)) and of the Department for Higher Education and Research. For all available statistic information about the French education system please refer to the following websites: [Facts and Statistical References](#), [The state of Education](#) and [The state of Higher Education and Research](#).

* The educational structure of the country is presented according to the national organisation and the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED - 1997 edition).

Structure of the national education system 2012/13



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Common European Reference Tools Provided by the Eurydice Network

- [National Student Fee and Support Systems](#)
 - [Organisation of the Academic Year in Higher Education](#)
 - [Organisation of School Time in Europe](#) (Primary and general secondary education)
 - [Recommended Annual Taught Time](#) in Full-Time Compulsory Education in Europe (Presented by grades/stages for full time compulsory education as well as by subject and country.)
 - [Teachers and School Heads Salaries and Allowances in Europe](#) (Salaries and allowances of teachers and school heads at pre-primary, primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education levels.)
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