

Understanding the French System

Higher Education Institutions

Universities

France's 88 public universities are spread throughout the country, from the Sorbonne in Paris (founded in 1179) to the high-tech campus of Nice-Sophia-Antipolis, and cover **the entire range of academic disciplines**: from the sciences, including mathematics, chemistry, physics, and biology; to technology, covering computer science, engineering, materials science, and electrical engineering; through to literature, languages, the arts, the social sciences, law, economics, management, health, sports, and more.

Research activities are an integral part of the universities: 315 doctoral schools train 4,000 doctoral students in connection with more than 1,200 research laboratories (affiliated with both the universities and research organizations). French doctoral schools have always been very open to international students: One out of every 4 PhD theses is prepared by a student from abroad.

Programs in medicine, pharmacology, and dentistry are connected to the universities in partnership with hospital centres, and have their own organization and courses of study.

Grandes Écoles

The *Grandes Écoles* are uniquely French institutions. Created in the early 19th century in parallel to the university system, they are extremely selective and offer education of a very high standard. Most offer degrees in engineering and business, but others specialize in public administration (such as the world-renowned École Nationale d'Administration), defense, university teaching and scholarly research (the Écoles Normales Supérieures), agronomy, or veterinary studies.

Grandes Écoles offer a diploma at Master level (Bac+5) but also intermediate degrees such as Bachelor (3 years), Master of Science (4 or 5 years), Mastère Spécialisé (6 years)...

Grandes Écoles for Engineering

There are roughly 240 Engineering Schools, which share common characteristics; this guarantees the quality of the Engineering Master Degree (5 years), which is a national degree and covers all areas of engineering science.

Grandes Écoles for Business and Management

More than 200 Business Schools offer specializations and training programs adapted to the changing economic environment and new management practices. Instruction is often structured around internships and international exchanges.

Specialized institutions

So-called specialist institutions offer higher-level training in specific areas such as art, design, fashion, tourism, architecture, paramedic services, social services, and so on.

Degrees

French higher education is adopting the common European architecture (LMD) that takes into account the number of years of validated study following the *baccalaureat* (French high school matriculation examination for university entrance). Thus, *baccalaureat* + three years = *Licence* (180 ECTS), *baccalaureat* + five years = *Master* (300 ECTS), and *baccalaureat* + eight years = *Doctorat* (PhD). Licence, Master and Doctorat are the key stages of higher education studies.

N.B :The *baccalaureat* is the first degree awarded in the higher education system; it gives students access to higher education institutions.

	National Degrees	Institution Degrees
8 years	Doctorat (PhD)	
6 years		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mastère spécialisé - Ms (Specialized Master) • Master of Business Administration - MBA
5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Master recherche - M2 (Master of Research) • Master professionnel - M2 (Professional Master) • Master of Science – MSc (accredited) • Diplôme d'ingénieur - Master degree in Engineering 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diplômes des Grandes Écoles d'ingénieur et de commerce - Master
4 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Master M1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Master of Science - MSc (4 or 5 years) • 4-year Master
3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Licence (Bachelor degree) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bachelor