

Background Information: Higher Education System in France



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Higher Education System in France

I. General Characteristics

Population	
Total population (I.I.2013) (million) ¹	65.63
Population density (2013) (persons per square kilometre) ²	103.8
Population Structure (2013) (share of total population %)³	
0-14 years	18.6
15-24 years	12.0
25-49 years	32.5
50-64 years	19.3
65 years and older	17.5
GDP	
GDP per capita in PPS (2013), EU 28 = 100 ⁴	107
GDP year-on-year growth rate (2013) ⁵	0.3
Education (2012) (All levels)⁶	
Enrolment	
Total (ISCED 0-6)	14,983,032
Tertiary Level of Education (ISCED 5-6)	2,296,306
Tertiary Education	
Population aged 25-64 years with tertiary education (2012) (%) ⁷	31.0
Population aged 30 – 34 years with tertiary education (2012) (%) ⁷	44.0
Public expenditure on tertiary education (percentage of GDP) (2011) ⁸	1.3

2. Types of Higher Education Institutions

Higher education institutions in France can be divided into universities, big institutions (*grands établissements*) (which offer the same kind of study programmes as universities but unlike universities, big institutions have selective admission policy and charge higher tuition fees), schools of engineering and business schools (some of which can be referred to as *grandes écoles*), preparatory classes (*classes préparatoires aux grandes écoles*, which prepare students for the entrance exams to selective schools, *grandes écoles*), two-year-vocational-

¹ European Commission. (2013). *Eurostat Compact Guides: Basic Figures on the EU, Winter 2013/2014 Edition*. Luxembourg: Publications office of the European Union.

² Eurostat. (2013). *Population density*. Retrieved from <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tps00003&plugin=0>

³ Eurostat (2013). *People by age group*. Retrieved from <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/refreshTableAction.do?tab=table&plugin=1&pcode=tps00010&language=en>

⁴ Eurostat. (2013). *GDP per capita in PPS*. Retrieved from <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=teco0114>

⁵ Eurostat (2013). *Real GDP growth rate*. Retrieved from <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=teco0115>

⁶ Eurostat (2014). *Students by ISCED level, age and sex*. Retrieved from http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=educ_en1rtl&lang=en

⁷ OECD. (2014). *Education at a glance 2014: OECD Indicators*, pp. 44. Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/edu/Education-at-a-Glance-2014.pdf>

⁸ OECD. (2014). *Education at a glance 2014: OECD Indicators*, pp. 232. Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/edu/Education-at-a-Glance-2014.pdf>

programme schools (located in high schools but are part of the higher education system, as they offer preparatory classes), and other specialised schools.

In 2012, there were 75 universities, 12 big institutions, 2307 institutions offering two-year vocational programmes, 451 institutions offering preparatory classes (some of these two types of institutions may be located within the same high school), 253 schools of engineering, 208 schools of business and management, 12 private institutions delivering university-like courses, and more than a thousand other specialised or professional schools⁹.

All French universities are Public Establishments of Scientific, Cultural, and Professional Character (EPSCPC) and are regulated by the 2007 LRU law. The universities in France accept all students with a high school graduation certificate known as the *baccalaureate*, with the exception of some special programmes which are selective. In addition to training and research units, universities also include internal institutions that provide short term technical training. These are IUT - technological university institutes (*instituts universitaires de technologie*) providing short term higher education. IUFM - primary teacher training colleges (*Instituts Universitaires de Formation des Maîtres*), previously with the status of administrative public institutions (EPA), have also been integrated into universities since 2005. The universities offer degrees in first (Bachelor), second (Master), and third (Doctoral) cycle qualifications.

Schools of engineering, business schools, and other high level schools are often included in the *grandes écoles* category in France. These schools are characterised by selective admission policies and high tuition rates. They accept fewer students than the universities and provide high level of training (five years with two years of initial preparation either in *grandes écoles*, *lycées*, or *universities*). Students receive an equivalent to a Master degree upon graduating from *grandes écoles*.

The EPAs are diverse and include a variety of institutions (some of which are dedicated to higher education) which fall under various Ministries. These mainly include some business schools and schools of engineering, military higher education institutions, national administration institutions, agricultural higher education institutions, artistic higher education institutions, business administration institutions, and the science and technology institutions.

There are two types of private higher education institutions in France – free private institutions, established under the freedom of higher education law, and private technical and management institutions, recognised by the Ministry of Higher Education.

In addition, numerous specialised schools offer courses in the fields of gastronomy, hotel management, fashion, films, photography, performing arts, and other areas. The training programme combines theoretical training in schools or universities with practical training in a company. Most programmes are two to five years in length. The diploma offered by the specialised schools may or may not be recognised as an equivalent to a Master degree.

⁹ *Repères et références statistiques sur les enseignements, la formation et la recherche*, 2013, p.72-73.

3. Study Structure

The French government signed the Bologna Declaration in 1999¹⁰. As a result of the Bologna Process, a three-cycle structure has been introduced in France. Higher education attainment and student's performance are gradually measured in credit points compatible with the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS).

First cycle qualification (Bachelor)

- The duration of Bachelor programmes offered by the universities is generally three years or six semesters with a workload of 180 ECTS credits.
- Successful completion of the two-year preparatory courses for *grandes écoles* also provides a qualification equivalent to the first cycle of tertiary education at a university.

Second cycle qualification (Master)

- The study duration of a Master degree is five years (including three years at the Bachelor level) with a workload of 120 ECTS credits.
- Upon successful completion of five years of studies at the *grandes écoles* graduates are awarded a Diploma equivalent to a Master degree.

Third cycle qualification (Doctoral)

- A Doctoral degree includes eight years of study (including three years at the Bachelor level and two years at the Master level).

Short cycle programmes

- The study duration of short cycle programmes is two to three years.

Long national degrees

- In some fields of study (mostly medicine and health) France continues to offer traditional long degrees, typically requiring six years of studies.

4. Admission Requirements^{11 12 13}

The entry requirements at universities include the French *baccalauréat*, an equivalent qualification, the diploma opening to university education (DAEU) (*diplôme d'accès aux études universitaires*), or the legal capacity (*capacité en droit*). Holders of DAEU can access higher education without the French *baccalauréat*. The purpose of DAEU is to facilitate and encourage students who left education early to resume their studies. In addition to the *baccalauréat* qualification, technological universities may employ other selection criteria. The entry requirements for *grandes écoles* include the French *baccalauréat* and successfully passing an examination that usually involves two years of preparation in CPGE.

¹⁰ Europa. (2010). The Bologna process: setting up the European Higher Education Area. Retrieved from http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/education_training_youth/lifelong_learning/c11088_en.htm

¹¹ Eurydice. (2014). *Bachelor*. Retrieved from <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/France:Bachelor>

¹² Eurydice. (2014). *Second cycle programmes*. Retrieved from https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/France:Second_Cycle_Programmes

¹³ Eurydice. (2014). *Third cycle (PhD) programmes*. Retrieved from https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/France:Third_Cycle_%28PhD%29_Programmes

Students with a Bachelor degree have automatic access to the first year of a Master programme in the same field. Admission to Doctoral programmes is open to the holders of a national Master diploma.

5. Enrolment Levels

Figure 1 shows trends in enrolment levels (5A, 5B and 6, ISCED 97) in France between 2003 and 2012. Tertiary Type 5A and 5B enrolment levels have increased slightly (9 % and 13 % respectively). The number of students enrolled in Tertiary Type 6 decreased between 2004 and 2006, however, remained stable thereafter.

6. Registration and/or Tuition Fees

In France, government bears the bulk of the cost of education for public institutions. The annual tuition rates are set by the law. Tuition rates for private institutions are generally higher than the public institutions and vary between 3,000 Euro and 10,000 Euro annually¹⁴.

7. Financial Support for Students^{15 16}

Financial support for students includes a combination of scholarships, accommodation subsidies, and other financial aid. The amount of scholarships based on social criteria is decided on the basis of the financial resources of the household, number of dependent children in the household, and the distance between the student's residence and their place of study. A new National Emergency Aid has been set up for students whose financial difficulties cannot be resolved through the scholarships based on social criteria e.g., sudden loss of parent's job, or adults resuming their studies. The aid will be allocated through a committee chaired by director of National Centre for University and Social Works (CNOUS).

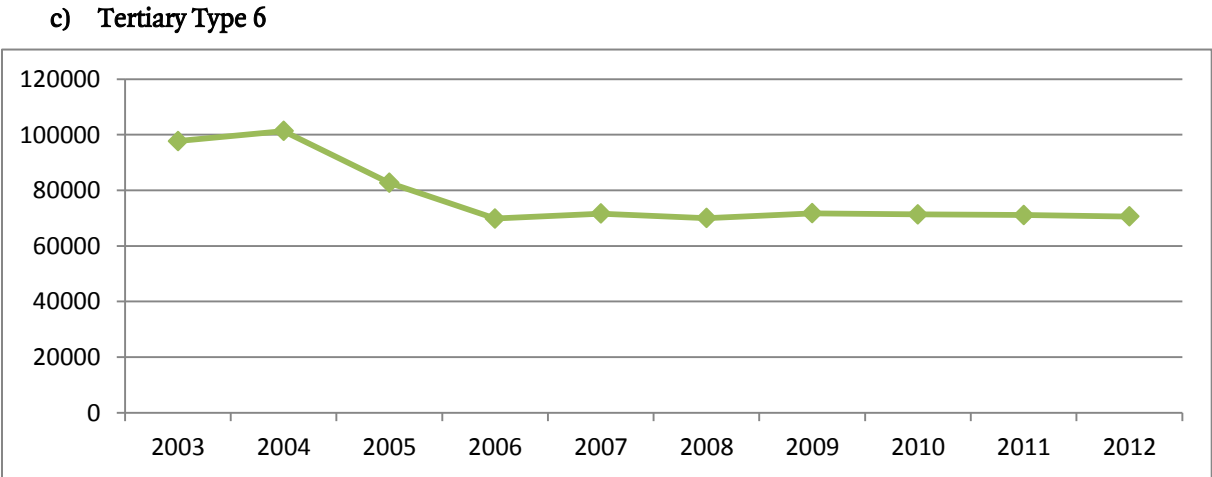
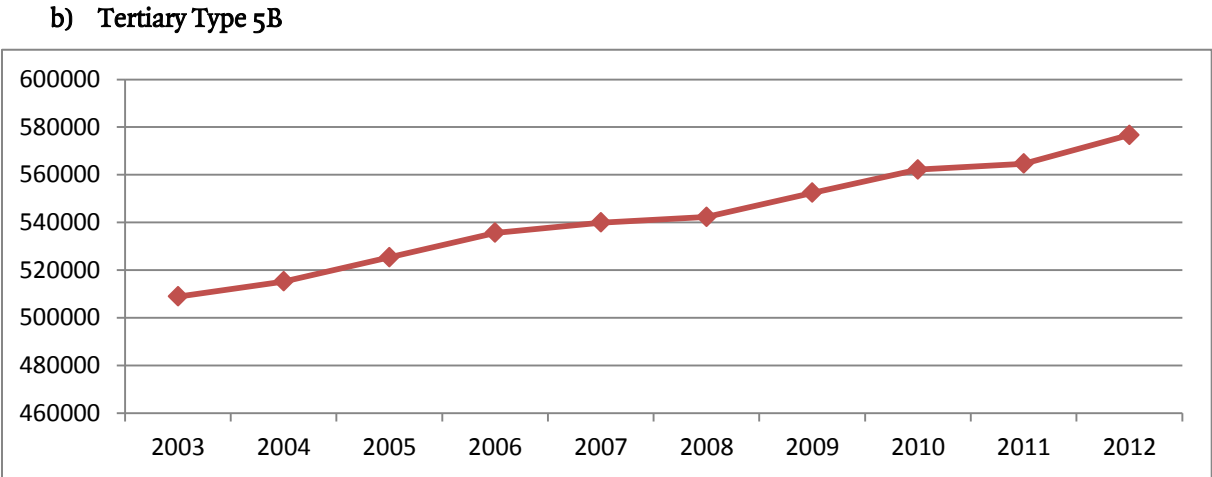
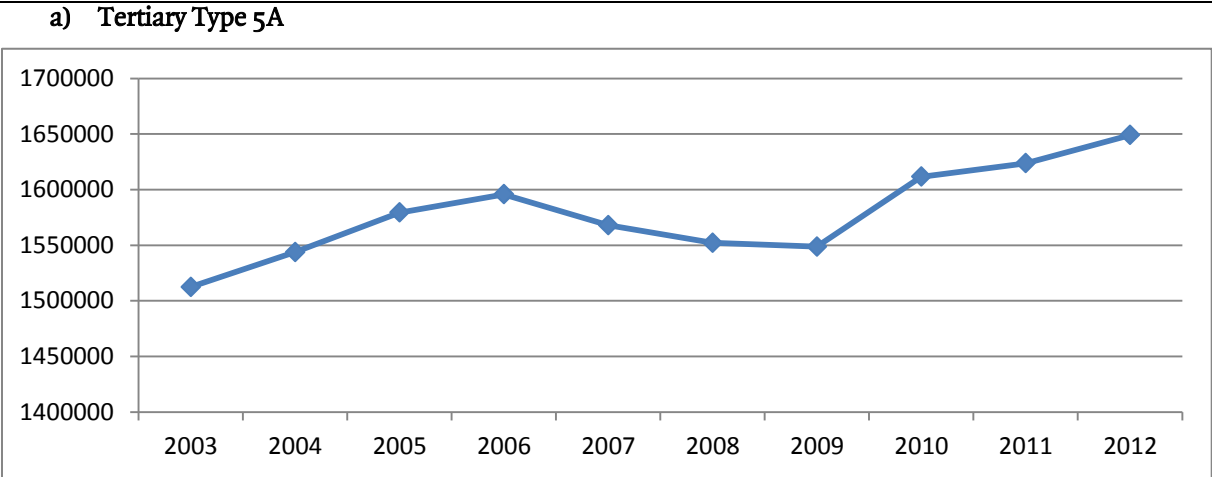
Students may receive personalised housing aid (APL) and a low-cost housing allowance (ALS). These two facilities are granted by the Family Allowance Fund based on social criteria (income, family situation, the kind of housing, etc.). Students choosing to use these housing facilities are considered independent from their parents and can enjoy right of access to family services.

¹⁴ National Institutes for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation. (2012), *Overview quality assurance system in higher education: France*, 25. Retrieved from http://www.niad.ac.jp/english/overview_fr_e.pdf

¹⁵ National Institutes for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation. (2012), *Overview quality assurance system in higher education: France*, 25. Retrieved from http://www.niad.ac.jp/english/overview_fr_e.pdf

¹⁶ Eurydice. (2014). *Higher education funding*. Retrieved from https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/France:Higher_Education_Funding

Figure 1: Trends in enrolment levels



Data source: Eurostat (2014), *Students by ISCED level age and sex*, European Commission. http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=educ_en1rtl&lang=en#

8. Note on the French data provided for EUROSTUDENT V

The weighting scheme of the sample used in the French dataset of EUROSTUDENT V does not take into account the study location. This has to be kept in mind when using indicators especially about student's accommodation. Indeed, finding accommodation in our capital city is quite difficult and more expensive than in the rest of the country.

This report is based on the following sources:

Eurydice. (2014). *Overview France*. Retrieved from

<https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/France:Overview>

National Institution for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation. (2012). *Overview quality assurance system in higher education: France*. Retrieved from http://www.niad.ac.jp/english/overview_fr_e.pdf