

Essential information for understanding current education issues



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1968–2018: 50 YEARS OF UNIVERSITY REFORMS

From new baccalaureate graduates...

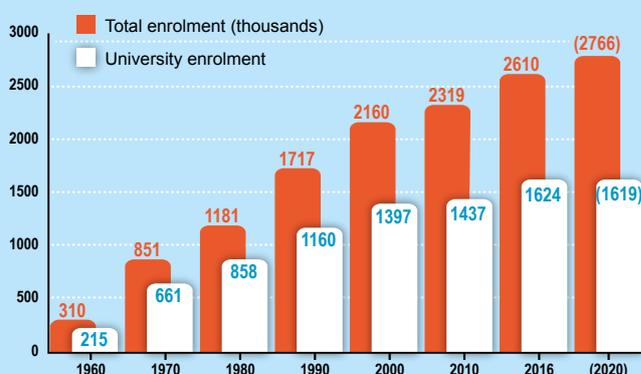
In 1968, 20% of students in a generation passed the baccalaureate exam in France. In 1984, the percentage was 28%, 63% in 1995, 63% in 2007 and 79% in 2018.

The first sessions of baccalaureate exams in technological education (1969) and vocational education (1987) had a catalytic effect. An overhaul of the vocational stream in 2009 helped to come close to reaching the target of 80% of students in an age group passing the baccalaureate exam.

... to new university students

The first wave of broad and open access occurred at the beginning of the 1960s, preceding the events of May 1968.

Enrolment in higher education



And new university degrees

In 1968, sociology freed itself from philosophy and moved from the status of a course to that of a degree programme. Bachelor degrees were created in several universities. The programmes were opened up to include analysis of the contemporary world, and students received methodological instruction.

The question of the autonomy of universities dates back to well before the 2007 law (no. 2007-1199) on the freedoms and responsibilities of universities. Indeed, such debates are inherent to the very development of higher education. After the French Revolution, while learned societies continued their research and scientific pursuits and the first *grandes écoles* [prestigious and selective university-level institutions] opened, an imperial university was founded in 1808, made up of specialised schools and faculties. The public civil servants who worked there were recruited to prepare students for legal, medical or ecclesiastical careers and, above all, to train future secondary school teachers. These autonomous subject-based groups maintained their legal status for a century and a half until 1968, the year when universities, which had been dissolved in 1793 and then institutionally re-established in 1896, became entities endowed with responsibilities again. This “republic of university faculties” made a lasting mark on higher education by structuring a separation from *grandes écoles* and research institutes, a characteristic of the “double dualism” in France, and by systematising co-management by the central administration and the decision-makers for each subject area.

THE (RE)BIRTH OF UNIVERSITIES THROUGH THE FAURE LAW (1968)

In the 1960s, student enrolment exploded. The creation of vocational education streams (STS) in 1959 and university institutes of technology (IUT) in 1966 was not enough to free up seats in the lecture theatres. Students also criticised lecture courses for being disconnected from their concerns and they contested the restrictive framework of the Fouchet reform which limited their freedoms (1966).

The Faure Law (1968) provided responses to the student protests of 1968 insofar as it brought a major reconfiguration of university powers, responses based on the principles of autonomy, participation and multidisciplinary. The reconfigured universities took on the status of scientific and cultural public institutions; they were governed by boards made up, in equal proportions, of students and professors, as well as administrative staff and members from outside the universities. The new vice-chancellors were encouraged to coordinate their actions within the national Conference of University Presidents (CPU), created in 1971.

The previously all-powerful faculties were broken up into teaching and research units (UER), which became the building blocks of a new structure. Professors were assured that they would have “full independence”

in research and teaching. In educational terms, credits replaced overly prescriptive programmes of study, paving the way for a more flexible education. The relationships between professors and students radically changed; classwork in small groups became more common, and continuous assessment was also introduced.

Although it was applied unevenly, the Faure Law marked the weakening of mandarin power everywhere.

Evaluation and self-evaluation

The National Evaluation Committee (CNE) (1985):

occasional assessment of the running of higher education institutions



French Agency for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (AERES) (2006):

evaluations, initially every four years and then every five years, of laboratories, courses and overall performance in institutions of higher learning

The French High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (HCERES) (2013):

assessment of objectives and means (quality assurance of processes)



For a rationalised allocation of resources

The San Remo system (1994), based on an analysis of costs and the average student/teacher ratios for courses, was converted in 2009 into the Sympa system. The latter is based on the number of students who sit exams and the number of university lecturers and researchers who publish research, as well as on assessments by the French Agency for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (AERES), bachelor degree graduation rates and the number of master's degree graduates.

Towards the harmonisation of higher education in Europe

Through the Bologna Process (48 signatory countries in 2018), harmonisation took place in two distinct phases.

Bachelor's, master's and doctorate degrees, and ECTS credits

In 1999, on the sidelines of the European Union, 29 education ministers signed the Bologna Declaration, giving rise to the European Higher Education Area – (EHEA). The aim was to adopt the same academic structure in two cycles – bachelor's and master's degrees – followed by a doctoral cycle, and to set out the workload required for each course through ECTS credits (one credit equals 25 or 30 hours of classwork).

Learning outcomes and quality

Beginning in 2010, the harmonisation focused on learning outcomes, and programme descriptions were rewritten in order to integrate them. Emphasis was also placed on the quality of teaching, with the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) putting forward indicators for that purpose.

THE SAVARY LAW (1984): THE FOUNDATIONS OF A PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION SERVICE

The ingredients in the Savary Law on higher education were hardly different from those in the Faure Law and they were implemented in a number of ways: more autonomous and democratic governance, and less-compartmentalised programmes that were more open to the world of work. The novelty lay, firstly, in the aim to modernise higher education by bringing universities and schools closer and, secondly, by updating the status of “university lecturer and researcher” (still the reference for the profession today).

Scientific and cultural public institutions became scientific, cultural and professional public institutions (EPSCP) and the category now included universities, *grandes écoles*, engineering schools and other institutions that enjoyed “pedagogical, scientific, administrative and financial autonomy”. Departments (UER) were replaced with “teaching and research units” (UFR), and the ideas of “components” and “shared services” appeared. Governance, carried out by an elected vice-chancellor, a governing body and an academic council, was enhanced through the addition of a third entity, the Council for Studies and University Life (CEVU).

University lecturers and researchers were limited to two statutory bodies of university lecturers: *maîtres de conférences* (MCF) and *professeurs des universités* (PR). The salary scale was revised through upwards levelling: assistant lecturers and graduate teaching assistants were, for example, made lecturers. Certified secondary school teachers, having passed either the *agrégation* or CAPES competitive exams, could thenceforth be assigned to higher education institutions to teach a set number of hours: 384 hours of seminars, compared with 192 hours of seminars for university lecturers. The law also set forth types of contractual employment (graduate student instructors, and temporary teaching and research assistants) and the conditions for replacement contracts.

CONTRACT-BASED FUNDING: A DISCREET POLICY (1989)

Initially intended for research only, contractual agreements created a new dialogue between the State and higher education institutions: by conditioning, even very slightly, public funding on an institution's plans and projects, the State indicated the legitimacy of higher education institutions' right to set their own directions, priorities and means. In doing so, it encouraged the institutions to develop their own strategies.

The tools for rationalising such funding relationships were implemented progressively. The implementation of the organic law on finance legislation (LOLF) (2001-2006) was decisive in introducing a culture of indicators inspired by new public management principles. Systemic assessments by the French Agency for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (AERES), created in 2006, gradually made the accountability processes related to the autonomy of institutions a matter of routine. A new step was taken in 2013, when the five-year contracts were applied to groupings of institutions rather than a sole institution.

THE BOLOGNA PROCESS: ANOTHER SEEMINGLY MINOR MEASURE WITH MAJOR EFFECTS

Although it was perceived as being administrative, the so-called LMD reform in France (2002-2006) had a major impact on the pedagogical independence of higher education institutions. With the adoption of the three-cycle structure and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), the education offering was standardised in its form and its content simultaneously became more diverse. For example, specialisations at the bachelor's, master's and doctorate levels in social and human sciences tripled in ten years, representing a hard-to-navigate plethora that a 2013 law (no. 2013-660) on higher education and research attempted to regulate.

THE PÉGRESSE LAW (2007): A REFORM CENTRED ON MANAGEMENT AND COORDINATION

The 2007 law (no. 2007-1199) on the freedoms and responsibilities of universities continued the process of making universities autonomous, which was already in progress.

The governing body for each university was limited to a maximum of 30 members, and had to include more members from outside the university. Its prerogatives increased: it was now the only entity to elect its vice-chancellor, who was endowed with new powers. The status of scientific, cultural and professional public institutions (EPSCP) was modified, forcing all higher education institutions to accept expanded responsibilities and areas of competence, which included managing the totality of their budget (payroll, operations and investments) and developing their own resources. Career guidance and preparation for employment were officially included in the mission statement for the higher education public service (i.e. creation of offices to help students' integration into the world of work). In reality, the aim was more to measure the effectiveness of higher education institutions than to encourage students' career planning.

The highly contested introduction of varying activity levels for university lecturers and researchers (instead of 50% research and 50% teaching) was abandoned in 2009.

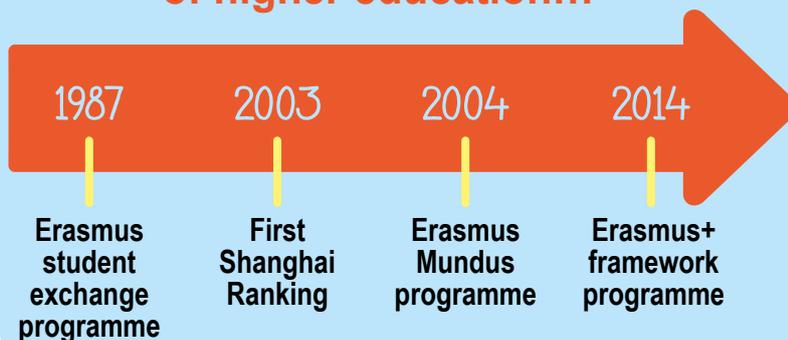
THE FIORASO LAW (2013) INTRODUCED A NEW FRAMEWORK FOR INSTITUTIONS

The 2013 law (no. 2013-660) on higher education and research was built on the conclusions of the Conference on Higher Education and Research in the autumn of 2012. It did not threaten the principle of the autonomy of higher education institutions, but set out a more restrictive framework in terms of territorial coordination.

Each institution of higher learning therefore had to be part of a group of universities and institutions (COMUE), enter a partnership with another EPSCP or merge with at least one other EPSCP. The multi-year contract now had to be signed by the State and the group. A COMUE, unlike a PRES, could be endowed with its own budget. Parity was established in all entities, and staff became better represented in the governing body. The Academic Council and the Council for Studies and University Life (CEVU) were replaced, respectively, by the Research Commission and the Commission for Education and University Life (CFVU), both of which have their own remits in addition to their consultative roles. The State no longer examines university programmes in detail; every five years it accredits higher education institutions that deliver national degrees and diplomas and only oversees the coherence of the education offering. For example, simplified nomenclatures have been adopted (from 320 to 45 bachelor's degree fields, from 1,844 to 173 professional undergraduate degree names, and from 5,900 to 246 Master's degree specialisations). The notion of continuum was introduced into the French Education Code with the aim of reinforcing cooperation between EPLE and EPSCP to encourage seamless pathways from secondary to higher education.

Beyond the publicised major changes that each law makes, a long-term analysis reveals a certain degree of continuity, a gradual evolution towards stronger higher education institutions.

The internationalisation of higher education...



... or territorialisation?

Since the decentralisation laws in the 1980s, the idea of autonomous higher education institutions as places for innovation contributing to economic growth has prevailed and, with it, the idea of grouping institutions together in order to enhance visibility of France in the globalised arena of higher learning.

➔ **26 Research and Higher Education Clusters (PRES)** prefigured a merger or pooling of some areas of competence (2006-2012).

➔ **Since 2013, 19 groupings of universities and institutions (COMUE) and seven associations**, have brought together universities, engineering schools, *grandes écoles* and research institutes around joint projects.

These groupings coordinate the local education offering and contribute to the development of a territorial strategy for research and knowledge transfer.

Launched in 2010 to support research and innovation, **the Investments for the Future programme (PIA)**, is a springboard for such groups, which are encouraged to demonstrate their dynamism by bidding on projects (e.g. IDEX).

AND IN 2018...

The State strategically maintains its managerial prerogative in the hiring and promotion of university lecturers and researchers, in keeping with the recommendation of the National Council of Universities (CNU).

The law (no. 2018-166) on students' academic guidance and success, also called the Vidal Law

➔ The online higher education selection website Parcoursup replaced Admission post-bac (APB) and introduced conditional admission ("Yes, if...").

➔ Clusters of higher education institutions were accredited to deliver bachelor's degrees.

➔ The opening of bachelor's degree programmes outside official categories and the combining of teaching methods are welcomed.

➔ The bachelor's degree reform opted for a structure in which blocks of courses are accumulated (different from the system of "one semester = 30 credits").

➔ Academic departments commit to an "educational contract for students' success".

At the same time, the law "a society of trust" on public services and "a society of trust" sets out to make the legal framework more flexible for the groupings introduced under the 2013 law by authorising higher education institutions to experiment with new alliances.

HERE ARE SOME REFERENCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

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ONLINE RESOURCES

- The Conference of University Presidents (CPU): <http://www.cpu.fr/>
- European Higher Education Area (EHEA): ministerial conferences, monitoring reports, etc.: <http://www.ehea.info/>
- European University Association (EUA): University autonomy in Europe: <https://www.university-autonomy.eu/>
- French Ministry for Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MESRI), Higher Education and Research in France: Facts and Figures (annual report): <https://publication.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/eesr/10EN/higher-education-and-research-in-france-facts-and-figures-10EN.php>

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