



# Focus on the Structure of Higher Education in Europe

2006/07

National Trends in the Bologna Process



## BELGIUM – French Community

The Bologna reform is above all apparent in the adoption of the 31 March 2004 decree. The decree governs the structure of university and non-university higher education, as well as that of some higher social advancement courses (*enseignement de promotion sociale*). It concerns all aspects of the Bologna process, all programmes and all fields of study.

The degree **structure based on three main cycles**, which has been introduced gradually since 2004/05 by the Bologna reform, will be fully implemented by the 2007/08 academic year at the latest. It is based on a first cycle lasting three years (180 ECTS credits) resulting in a Bachelor's degree (*Bachelier*) followed by a second cycle lasting a minimum of one to two years (60 to 120 ECTS credits) and resulting in a Master's degree or graduate studies in medicine (minimum four years or 240 ECTS credits) or veterinary medicine (three years or 180 ECTS credits). The third cycle then lasts at least three years (180 ECTS credits) and results in a doctorate degree.

Two systems will coexist (studies from the 'pre-Bologna' structure still exist alongside the three-cycle structure, and concern all areas of study for students who began their studies

before 2004/05) during a transitional period until 2009.

The **third cycle** (doctoral research and training) exists only at universities. Entry to third-cycle programmes is possible after obtaining a Master's qualification following two years of study (120 ECTS credits) and after a *licence* in the old structure. These programmes consist of doctoral courses (optional) lasting one year (60 ECTS credits) which lead to a research training certificate, and offer graduates a high-level academic and professional qualification. The programmes also consist of individual research for a doctoral thesis (at least three years or 180 ECTS credits), which, if successfully defended, leads to the qualification of doctor. Training is provided in doctoral schools (*écoles doctorales*) (French Community governmental order, 4 March 2005) belonging to one or several university associations (*académies universitaires*).

Doctoral students can have different statuses. Certain doctoral students receive a grant with social benefits and tax exemption, and others are employed by the institution where the doctoral programme is offered.

The transition from ISCED level 5B to ISCED level 5A is possible in the three-cycle structure.

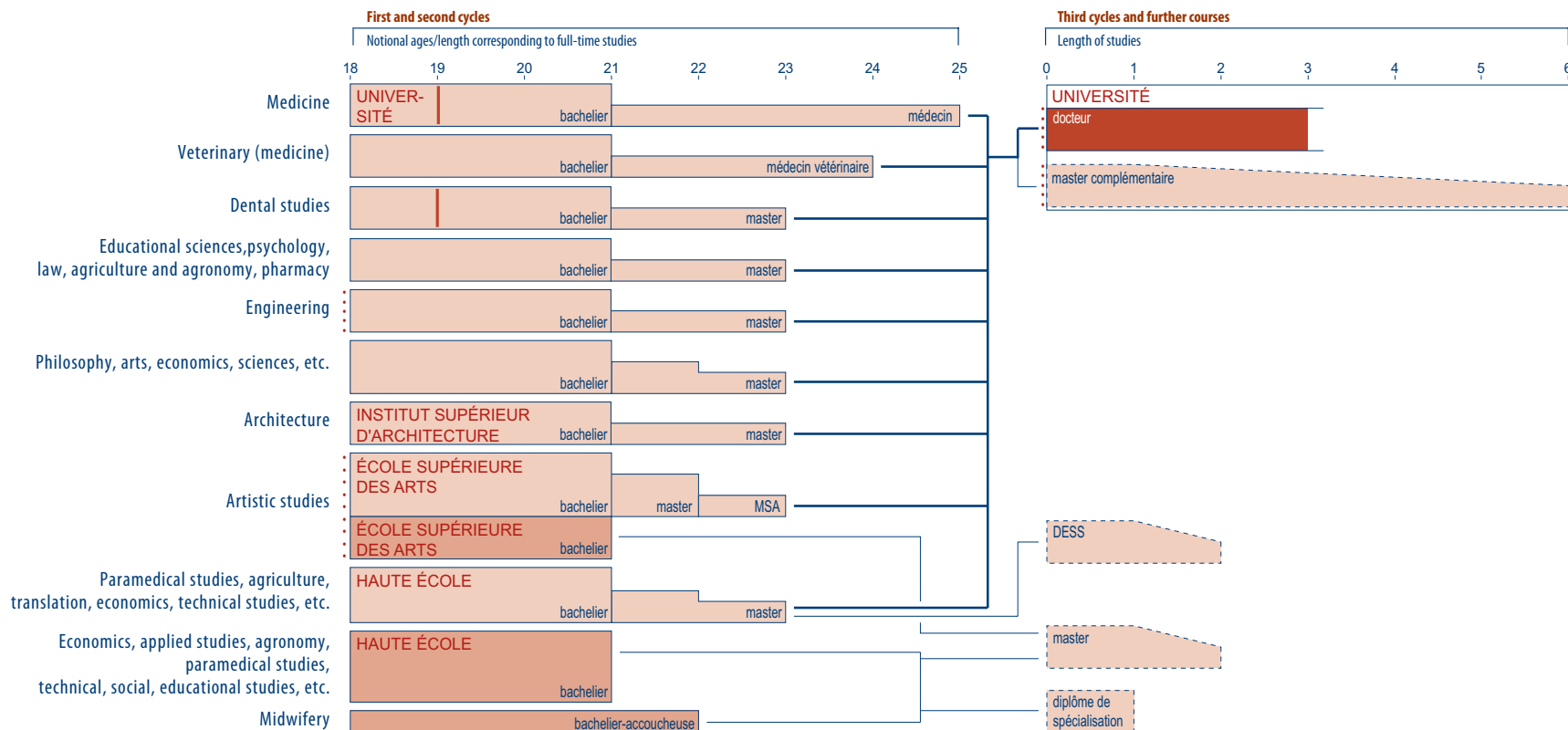
ISCED level 5B programmes, or short courses, are offered as a single cycle and lead to a Bachelor's degree awarded after a minimum of three years of study (180 ECTS credits). This type of degree provides access to the long, ISCED level 5A courses (Bachelor's or Master's) in a *Haute École* or university via bridging classes (specified and regulated by the 30 June 2006 orders).

This involves the successful completion of one year of preparatory studies or complementary courses.

Along with the bridging classes, there may be exemptions (left to the judgement of the academic authorities) from certain parts of the programme when transferring to ISCED level 5A programmes.

The French Community of Belgium has not yet adopted a **National Qualifications Framework**, but a working group was set up following a 27 March 2006 decision.

Legislation (above-mentioned 31 March 2004 decree) provides for the existence of **joint and/or double degrees** which can be



Source: Eurydice.

ISCED 5A (1st or 2nd programme)	ISCED 6 programme	Selection procedure/limitation of places at institutional level
ISCED 5B (1st or 2nd programme)	Further qualification	Selection procedure/limitation of places at national/regional level

| DESS Diplôme d'Études Supérieures Spécialisées | MSA Master spécialisé artistique

Only the new system introduced in 2004/05 is shown in the diagram. Higher education is currently in a transitional phase; two systems will coexist until 2009.

In accordance with the requirements set out by the Belgian federal government to establish a *numerus clausus* for access to the professions of physician and dentist, a selection process has been introduced at the close of the first year of studies to determine who should continue with the programmes in medicine and dentistry.

Graduates (*bacheliers*) of the ISCED level 5B first cycle programmes can access Master's programmes, provided they successfully complete a year of preparatory studies or via an additional, supplementary study programme.

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organised and awarded by two or more higher education institutions at national and international level. Two additional decrees adopted in June 2006 are aimed at facilitating cooperation agreements between Belgian higher education institutions and between Belgian and foreign institutions, as well as the award of joint or double degrees. Another objective is to guarantee the quality of student mobility within the framework of this cooperation.

Currently, the ECTS system is almost fully implemented. This system was introduced gradually in 1998/99 within the framework of student exchange programmes. In 2001/02, certain university programmes were already using the ECTS system. It has been compulsory since 2005. All programmes (including doctorates) must be offered in ECTS credits for both transfer and accumulation. The institutions which have not yet introduced it are aiming to do so for the current academic year.

Since 2004/05, the **Diploma Supplement** (DS) has been used in all types of higher education establishment. Universities already began issuing the DS in 2002 on a voluntary basis, and certain *Hautes Écoles* followed suit

in 2003/04. It is issued in French automatically and free of charge to all students. Institutions may also issue it in English free of charge to students on request.

**Incentives** exist in order to favour the widespread implementation of the three-cycle structure, ECTS and the DS. As regards the three-cycle structure, the French Community has provided grants to new academies, as well as favouring the implementation of a structure for exchanges between universities and *Hautes Écoles* and the use of 'Bologna promoters'. Specific working groups as well as joint reflection among universities and other higher education institutions further this same objective in view of the widespread implementation of ECTS. A modification of texts related to the DS is planned by the administration in order to standardise current texts, meet European requirements (DS with a European label) and do away with all legibility problems. There have not been any specific **financial incentives** for the implementation of ECTS and the DS.

The implementation of the three-cycle structure, ECTS and the DS is not subject to special **control measures** on behalf of the French Community. However, the different

consultative bodies for higher education express their opinions regularly on the above-mentioned issues, and organise meetings between institutions in order to promote collaboration in these areas. The French Community highly recommends the use of ECTS in the very near future.

Following the 14 November 2002 decree, the **Agency for Higher Education Quality Evaluation** (*Agence pour l'évaluation de la qualité de l'enseignement supérieur organisé ou subventionné par la Communauté française*) was created. This independent agency has been operating officially since January 2004, and evaluates higher education organised by or receiving aid from the French Community.

Apart from representing the French Community vis-à-vis national and international bodies in the area of higher education quality evaluation, the Agency facilitates cooperation among all parties in higher education as a means of encouraging practices to improve quality at each institution. It is also responsible for ensuring the evaluation of higher education by drawing attention to good practices, as well as to inadequacies and problems that must be overcome. It must also ensure that evaluation

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procedures defined in the 2002 decree are followed. The courses to be evaluated are determined by the Agency based on a multi-annual plan updated annually. It must submit proposals to policymakers for improving the overall quality of higher education. Students participate in the activities of the Agency, with three representatives chosen from double lists put forward by student bodies. These students have voting rights. The Agency selects experts for purposes of **external evaluation**. The committee of experts consists mainly of a representative from the professional world and academics from the discipline undergoing evaluation. There is a preference for foreign specialists who are not involved in any way with the institutions being evaluated. Students are interviewed by the experts during the visits.

The expert committee drafts a confidential report on each institution visited, which is communicated solely to its management and the president of the Agency. On completing an evaluation, the committee drafts a 'horizontal' report which includes general comments and information regarding all institutions, without naming them. It is forwarded to the management of all the institutions concerned

and to the members of the Agency. The latter comment on the report, which is then passed on to the minister responsible for higher education for submission to the government.

The November 2002 decree states that higher education institutions must set up their own **internal evaluation** committee. In addition, each institution must nominate a resource person to act as an intermediary between the Agency and the institution itself, in order to pass on information and encourage the participation of institutions.

Strictly speaking, there is no **accreditation** system for higher education institutions in the French Community. However, it is reasonable to think in terms of an 'ex ante' accreditation system, as only institutions that satisfy criteria established by the regulations may be recognised and subsidised by the French Community. Recognised institutions may provide courses only in subjects for which authorisation has been granted under the regulations. They alone may award qualifications which are recognised academically or in law (in the case of those giving access to regulated professions in particular). Universities may have their authorisation to offer certain *master*

*complémentaire* programmes (specialised programmes open to holders of a first Master's qualification) temporarily withdrawn if the number of students enrolled is not sufficient. Given their autonomy, higher education institutions are free to seek the accreditation of professional or sectoral bodies, but this has no legal implications (for example with regard to funding). There is no accreditation procedure for totally private institutions.

The Agency has been a candidate member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (**ENQA**) since May 2006.

The missions (defined in the decree establishing the Agency) and the processes used (methodological notes) by the Agency are available at [www.aeqes.be](http://www.aeqes.be). The Agency is not yet subject to external evaluation.

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### Legislative and/or official references

Date	Term in English	Term in national language
7 July 1970	Law related to the general structure of higher education	Loi relative à la structure générale de l'enseignement supérieur
5 August 1995	Decree establishing the general organisation of higher education in <i>Hautes Écoles</i>	Décret fixant l'organisation générale de l'enseignement supérieur en Hautes Écoles
14 November 2002	Decree establishing the Agency for Higher Education Quality Evaluation, for higher education organised by or receiving aid from the French Community	Décret créant l'Agence pour l'évaluation de la qualité de l'enseignement supérieur organisé ou subventionné par la Communauté française
18 June 2003	French Community governmental order specifying the forms and grades of diplomas and supplements issued by art colleges ( <i>Écoles supérieures des Arts</i> )	Arrêté du Gouvernement de la Communauté française déterminant les formes et les mentions des diplômes et des suppléments délivrés par les Écoles supérieures des Arts
3 July 2003	French Community governmental order specifying the models of diplomas and supplements issued by <i>Hautes Écoles</i> and French Community higher education juries	Arrêté du Gouvernement de la Communauté française déterminant les modèles des diplômes et des suppléments aux diplômes délivrés par les Hautes Écoles et les jurys d'enseignement supérieur de la Communauté française
31 March 2004	Decree defining higher education, favouring its integration within European higher education and refunding universities	Décret définissant l'enseignement supérieur, favorisant son intégration dans l'espace européen de l'enseignement supérieur et refinançant les universités
2 June 2004	French Community governmental order specifying the forms and grades of diplomas and supplements issued by architecture institutes ( <i>Instituts supérieurs d'Architecture</i> ) and the French Community higher education jury	Arrêté du Gouvernement de la Communauté française déterminant la forme et les mentions des diplômes et des suppléments aux diplômes délivrés par les Instituts supérieurs d'Architecture et le jury d'enseignement supérieur de la Communauté française
4 March 2005	French Community governmental order establishing the list of doctoral schools	Arrêté du Gouvernement de la Communauté française fixant la liste des écoles doctorales

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Date	Term in English	Term in national language
20 July 2005	French Community governmental order specifying the models of diplomas and supplements issued by universities and French Community university education juries	Arrêté du Gouvernement de la Communauté française déterminant les modèles des diplômes et des suppléments aux diplômes délivrés par les institutions universitaires et les jurys d'enseignement universitaire de la Communauté française
2 June 2006	Decree with diverse provisions regarding art studies in higher education	Décret portant diverses mesures en matière d'enseignement supérieur artistique
2 June 2006	Decree establishing the academic degrees offered by <i>Hautes Écoles</i> organised by or receiving aid from the French Community, and establishing minimum timetables	Décret établissant les grades académiques délivrés par les Hautes Écoles organisées ou subventionnées par la Communauté française et fixant les grilles d'horaires minimales
16 June 2006	Decree related to the cooperation agreements between universities for the organisation of studies, laying down various provisions with regard to higher education	Décret relatif aux conventions de coopération pour l'organisation d'études entre institutions universitaires et portant diverses dispositions en matière d'enseignement supérieur
30 June 2006	Decree modernising the operations and funding of <i>Hautes Écoles</i>	Décret modernisant le fonctionnement et le financement des hautes écoles
30 June 2006	French Community governmental order specifying the bridging classes providing access to studies in <i>Hautes Écoles</i>	Arrêté du Gouvernement de la Communauté française fixant les passerelles donnant accès aux études organisées en Hautes Écoles
30 June 2006	French Community governmental order specifying the conditions for access to university studies for students with academic degrees issued at non-university institutions	Arrêté du Gouvernement de la Communauté française fixant les conditions d'accès aux études à l'université pour les porteurs de grades académiques délivrés hors université