Youth parliament

There is no youth parliament in France.

Youth councils and/or youth advisory boards

The main advisory boards on which young people sit are local councils, the student-organisation and youth-movement group of the CESE - Economic, Social, and Environmental Council (See Glossary) [1], the student colleges of higher-education establishments, and lycée (senior secondary school) bodies.

- Institutional instances

Two councils were created respectively in 2015 and 2016 to contribute to the policies of childhood
and youth:


Article 69 of the Act of 28 December 2015 on adapting society to ageing introduced this High Council and placed it under the Prime Minister’s authority, to promote the continuity and complementarity of policies in favour of families, children and adolescents, retirees and the elderly.

It is a reflection and guidance body that produces reports, issues opinions and makes recommendations. The High Council is comprised of a Council for children and adolescents, within which sits a college of children.

Twelve children and adolescents, with an equal number of boys and girls from different geographical areas and social demographics comprise the college of children. It is regularly involved in guiding national public policies. This body provides its expertise on topics under discussion within the Council.

The Order of 28 October 2016 sets out the conditions for the formation and organisation of the College of children and adolescents:

“The formation specialised in children and adolescents within the High Council of Family, Children and Age shall consult the associated college of children and adolescents at least three times per year. It shall inform it of any works it carries out and shall request its opinion on their progress.”

-Advisory Council on Youth Policies (Conseil d’orientation des politiques de jeunesse, COJ)

At national level, in 2016, the Advisory Council on Youth Policies (Conseil d’orientation des politiques de jeunesse, COJ) was created by Decree no. 2016-1377 of 12 October 2016. It is an administrative advisory body, placed under the authority of the Prime minister.

The COJ has three main missions:

- it can be consulted on legislative or regulatory drafts relating to youth and may examine any general interest matter relating to youth policy;
- it can send the Government proposals to improve the circumstances of young people;
- every year, it must send the Government an activity report.

This Council is comprised of 79 members including youth representatives and youth organisations.

- Local councils

Since 1970, local authorities have been involved in young people’s participation in local democracy. The authorities (regions, départements, and municipalities) have a certain amount of freedom in setting up youth-representation bodies, which leads to diversity in the design, frequency, and practice of setting up those councils. Local youth councils are gathered together in a network, the
The student-organisation and youth-movement group of the CESE

Structure: The CESE is made up of eighteen representation groups in which members are distributed according to their professional affiliations. The student-organisation and youth-movement group represents the interests of young people and students.

Composition: It is made up of members drawn from the voluntary sector and from the student-union sector:

- UNEF – National Student Union of France (Union Nationale des Étudiants de France)
- FAGE – Federation of General Student Associations (Fédération des Associations Générales Étudiantes)
- JOC – Young Christian Workers (Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne)
- MRJC - Rural Christian Youth Movement (Mouvement Rural de Jeunesse Chrétienne)
- FFJ – French Youth Forum (Forum Français de la Jeunesse)

Role and responsibility: The group expresses ideas on environmental, social, and economic matters. Some of its members belong to the nine sections of the ESEC, of which the role is to carry out studies and draw up draft opinions. In addition, group members also vote on opinions presented by the sections during plenary assemblies.

1. Sustainable Territorial Planning;
2. Economy and Finance; Education,
3. Culture, and Communication; Environment;
4. Agriculture,
5. Fishing, and Food;
6. Economic Activities;
7. European and International Affairs;
8. Social Affairs and Health;
9. Labour and Jobs.

Financing: The budget of the Economic, Social, and Environmental Council (Conseil Économique, Social, et Environnemental) is financed by the State. Parliament votes on it each year, as part of the law on finance, as required by the “State Control and Advice” mission. Each member of the ESEC receives an allowance.

Higher-education establishment bodies

Universities have several consultative and decision-making bodies within which students can have a presence, thus taking part in the management of their establishment. Those structures include:

- The boards of governors of the CROUS - Regional Centres for University and School Services (Centres Régionaux des Œuvres Universitaires et Scolaires)
Structure: The CROUS were set up by the law of 16 April 1955. They are public establishments that come under the oversight of the Ministry of National Education, Higher Education, and Research (Ministère de l’Éducation Nationale, de l’Enseignement Supérieur, et de la Recherche). Their aim is to improve the conditions in which students live and study, in particular by providing services and benefits under ministerial guidelines. France has 28 CROUS centres forming a national network, the CNOUS - National Centre for University and School Services (Centre National des Œuvres Universitaires et Scolaires).

Each CROUS has a board of governors, which acts as a deliberative and decision-making body with young people amongst its members.

Composition: The Board of Governors is made up of 24 members, including 7 elected student representatives as well as a deputy chairperson elected by the board of governors. Elections for student representatives on the Board of Governors are held every two years. Those student representatives are often members of student unions or student movements.

Role and responsibility: The Board of Governors sets out general policy, and votes on the CROUS’s budget. As with other members, student representatives play a part in drafting projects that relate to areas such as university life, jobs, and cultural life. They take part in making decisions and they make proposals to implement students’ requests.

Financing: CROUS centres are considered to be operators tasked with implementing policies defined by the Ministry of Higher Education. In that regard, they receive public grants (from the State and from local authorities). Their partnership with universities is based on performance agreements. Part of the CROUS’s budget is allocated to boards of governors.

Students also have the chance to take part in university debates and in the life of their establishment by participating in elections and by sitting on the various councils of their establishment. Higher-education establishments are required to train student representatives. Law no. 2013-660 of 22 July 2013 on higher education and research, more specifically article 116, defines and sets the composition of those various central councils, which are:

- **The university’s board of governors**

  The board of governors defines the university’s policies.

  **Role and responsibility:** It examines and approves the establishment contract, votes on its budget, and determines job allocation based on proposals from the vice-chancellor of the university.

  **Composition:** five students sit on the board of governors (five postholders and five substitutes).

- **The academic council’s CFVU - Commission on Training and University Life (Commission de la Formation et de la Vie Universitaire)**

  **Role and responsibility:** The CFVU – Commission on Training and University Life (Commission de la
Formation et de la Vie Universitaire) is consulted on all matters relating to studies and university life (university programmes, teaching, testing arrangements, and creating qualifications). In particular, it adopts rules relating to exams, as well as measures on student guidance and on validation of knowledge acquired, as well as cultural, sports, social, and community activities, etc.

**Composition:** The CFVU has forty members, including student representatives (fourteen on average).

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**Lycée bodies**

From the lycée stage onwards, young people can take part in the democratic life of their establishment by sitting on lycée bodies: class councils, CVL - Councils of delegates on Lycée Life (Conseils des délégués pour la Vie Lycéenne), CAVL - Academic Councils on Lycée Life (Conseils Académiques de la Vie Lycéenne) and the CNVL - National Council on Lycée Life (Conseil National de la Vie Lycéenne).

- **Class councils are defined by** article 33 of decree no. 85-924 of 30 August 1985 on local public education establishments ([13](#)).

**Role and responsibility:** Class councils deal with educational matters relating to life in class and to organising the personal work of pupils; in addition, they draw up pupils’ school reports. They also issue an opinion on wishes for guidance expressed by families and pupils.

**Composition:** Within establishments, each class must elect two titular delegates for the school year. Those delegates are pupils’ spokespersons to educational teams, especially in class councils ([14](#)). They can inform educational teams of all matters relating to class organisation as well as guidance. All pupils can vote and stand for election. Candidacies are individual. Pupils who have not submitted their candidacies can be elected if they receive enough votes. Elections are by secret ballot using a single-member vote over two rounds. Class delegates take part in the general assembly of delegates, which meets at least twice a year and is chaired by the head of the establishment.

- **The Higher Council for Education (Conseil Supérieur de l’Éducation)**

Set up pursuant to law no. 89-486 of 10 July 1989 on guidance in education, ([15](#)) the CSE - Higher Council for Education (Conseil Supérieur de l’Éducation) is a consultative body chaired by the Minister of National Education, and has 97 members.

**Role and responsibility:** The Council is a consultative body that is called upon to issue opinions on:

- the objectives and functioning of the public education department
- the regulation of syllabuses, exams, and the issuing of qualifications
- matters concerning private educational establishments and the staff of those establishments working under contract
- all matters of national interest concerning teaching and education.

**Composition:** It is made up of 97 titular members and their substitutes, who represent:
The members hold office for a four-year term, except for representatives of users and lycée students, who hold office for two years.

**The CVL - Council of delegates for Lycée Life (Conseil des délégués pour la Vie Lycéenne)** [16]

**Role and responsibility:** The CVL is a body for dialogue and for exchanges between lycée students and adults. Half of its membership is made up of elected student representatives, and the other half is made up of adult members of the educational community. Elected lycée-student representatives can freely express their expectations and concerns, and give opinions. The CVL must be consulted on matters relating to:

- organising sports, cultural, and extracurricular activities
- health, hygiene, and safety, as well as laying out areas for the use of lycée students
- organising studies, school time, the school project, and the rules of procedure
- organising personal work, support and help for pupils, language and cultural exchanges in partnership with European and foreign educational establishments, etc.
- information on guidance as well as school and university studies.

**Composition:** The CVL is chaired by the head of the establishment. It is made up of 10 lycée students elected by direct universal suffrage for 2-year terms, with half the posts being open to election every year; 5 teachers; and 3 members of administrative staff. Adult members of the CVL have a consultative role, and cannot vote.

**The CAVL - Academic Council on Lycée Life (Conseil Académique de la vie Lycéenne)** [17]

**Composition:** The CAVL – Academic Council on Lycée Life (Conseil Académique de la Vie Lycéenne) is defined by decree no. 91-916 of 16 September 1991, as amended, on the setting up of academic councils on lycée life [18], and circular no. 2002-065 of 28 March 2002 on academic councils on lycée life [19]. It is made up of a maximum of 40 members, half of whom are lycée students, holding two-year terms of office. It is chaired by the Chief Education Officer, whose role is to appoint the adult members of the council.

**Role and responsibility:** The CAVL drafts opinions on the school life and work of lycée students. It is the body for dialogue between lycée-student representatives and the Local Education Authority so called : académies* In order to fulfil their mission, elected members must be in regular contact with the CVL’s lycée-student representatives.

*Académie : Administrative district of the Ministry of Education (Ministère de l’Éducation)

**The CNVL - National Council on Lycée Life (Conseil National de la Vie Lycéenne)** [20],

- staff: teachers; guidance, educational, management, and inspection staff; administrative, technical, blue-collar, and service staff
- users: pupils’ parents, students, and lycée students
- State partners in education: local authorities, extracurricular associations, and family associations.
The role and functioning of the council is defined by decree no. 95-1293 of 18 September 1995, as amended, on the setting up of the National Council on Lycée Life (Conseil National de la Vie Lycéenne) [21], circular no. 2000-150 of 21 September 2000 on the composition and functioning of the National Council on Lycée Life (Conseil National de la Vie Lycéenne), and circular no. 2010-128 of 20 August 2010.

**Role and responsibility:** The Council meets twice a year, and gives its opinion on matters relating to school work and to social, sports, and cultural life in lycées.

**Composition:** The Council is chaired by the Minister of National Education (Ministre de l'Éducation Nationale) or her / his representative, appointed by ministerial ruling. It has 33 members elected for two-year terms. Each of the thirty académies has one representative on the CNVL, who is elected for a two-year term by lycée-student representatives of the CAVL. The three lycée-student representatives of the CSE – Higher Council for Education (Conseil Supérieur de l'Éducation) are also members of the CNVL.

**Financing:** Those various lycée bodies are subsidised by the Lycée Life Fund (Fonds de la Vie Lycéenne), which was set up to support pupils' initiatives in “the life of their establishment” (Circular No. 2001-184 OF 26-9-2001 [22]). The fund is financed by the annual academic endowment for public secondary education, “Educational and Operating Grants”.

**Consultative bodies within ministries**

With a view to renewing democratic life and to encouraging the participation of young people, various ministries have been able to put in place ad hoc or one-off arrangements aimed at encouraging young people to speak out and at gathering their proposals regarding specific policies and programmes. By way of example, the Ministry in charge of Labour, has set up a cross-ministerial working group called “Youth Guarantee” (“Garantie Jeunes”) to set up the arrangement of the same name, which it has put together with fifty participants, including five young community representatives

Jean-Claude Richez, a researcher at the INJEP – National Institute for Youth and Non-Formal Education (Institut National de la Jeunesse et de l’Éducation Populaire), wrote a report, published in 2014, on those various participation arrangements, État des lieux des dispositifs de participation des jeunes dans les départements ministériels [Situational analysis of arrangements for youth participation in ministerial departments]. In that report, he highlights the variety of those modes of participation, which contribute to better “making young people part of the public arena”.

**Higher education student union(s)**

From a strictly legal perspective, there are no student unions in France. The latter are in fact representative student associations or organisations that define themselves as unions. The description of “representative student organisation” was created by the Jospin Law (framework law no. 89-486 of 10 July 1989 on education [23]).

In article 13, the law specifies: “Representative bodies are student associations that have the objective of defending the collective and individual material and moral rights and interests of students. In that regard, they sit on the National Council on Higher Education and Research (Conseil
National de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche) and on the National Centre for University and School Services (Centre National des Œuvres Universitaires et Scolaires).” Those organisations receive help with training elected officials, and they receive, pro rata to their number of elected officials, a significant portion of their financing and grants made for the purpose of training elected officials.

Only 1% of French students are unionised, and less than 8% of students take part in union elections. Nonetheless, student unions have substantial influence over the life of their establishment and, more generally, over higher education. French students can choose between several unions and movements. Nonetheless, the UNEF - National Student Union of France (Union Nationale des Étudiants de France) and the FAGE – Federation of General Student Associations (Fédération des Associations Générales Étudiantes) are the main unions recognised by the public authorities.

- The **UNEF - National Student Union of France (Union Nationale des Étudiants de France)** [4]

The UNEF was set up in the 19th century.

**Composition:** The UNEF claims to have 19 000 members, including elected student officials.

The UNEF is organised both nationally and locally; the union has local sections: **Associations Générales des Étudiants** (AGE – General Student Associations) that are present in each university town / city. Each AGE is run by a bureau made up of a chairperson, a general secretary, and a treasurer, who are elected every two years at a local congress during which AGE members also vote on the UNEF’s focus.

The UNEF’s main body is the National Congress, which meets every two years to elect the Administrative Commission, which is responsible for electing the National Bureau; the latter is the UNEF’s executive body, and it implements decisions taken by the National Congress. The National Bureau is made up of the Chairperson, the Deputy Chairperson, the General Secretary, and the National Treasurer.

**Role and responsibility:** The UNEF’s mission is to defend the rights and interests of students, as well as to express their wishes and opinions on all matters relating to student life: vocational and academic training, student accommodation, health, culture, etc.

**Financing:** Like all student organisations and student unions, the UNEF is an association. Its financing rules are the ones that apply to associations, and its resources can be drawn from public grants, membership fees, private donations, etc.

- The **FAGE - Federation of General Student Associations (Fédération des Associations Générales Étudiantes)** [5]

The FAGE was founded in 1989, and brings together almost 2 000 associations and unions. The FAGE has been recognised as a representative student organisation by the Ministry of Higher
Education (Ministère de l’Enseignement Supérieur), and it is also accredited by the Ministry of Youth. The FAGE is independent of parties and of employees’ unions.

**Composition:** The FAGE functions as an association. It is made up of a Board of Governors which brings together some fifty federations (territorial and sectoral) and associated members. The role of the Board of Governors is to set define strategic guidelines and take decisions. It meets once every two months.

**Role and responsibility:** The FAGE’s fields of action cover several subjects like independence, academic success, improving living and studying conditions for young people, as well as defending their rights and their democratic representation. It plays a role as student spokesperson, and it is an instrument of citizenship that enables young people to debate, to undertake projects, and to take on responsibilities in society.

**Financing:** Lycée-student and other student organisations that describe themselves as unions are constituted as associations; their financing rules are the same as those that apply to associations. Their budgets are drawn from their own resources (membership fees, private donations, etc.) and from public grants, such as credits from the FSDIE – Solidarity and Development Fund for Student Initiatives (Fonds de Solidarité et de Développement des Initiatives Étudiantes). The FSDIE is a fund that is mainly aimed at financing projects implemented by student associations.

**School student union(s)**

**Structure:** As with student unions, organisations that represent lycée students are governed by the law of 1 July 1901 (i.e. they are non-profit associations); they are not employees’ unions. There are several “student unions”, not a single organisation representing lycée students. Some of those unions are the lycée sections of student unions. They can be apolitical, independent, or affiliated to a political party. Those organisations include the FIDL – Independent Democratic Federation of Lycée Students (Fédération Indépendante Démocratique Lycéenne) [25], the SGL – General Union of Lycée Students (Syndicat Général des Lycéens), and the UNI National Inter-University Union (Union Nationale Inter-Universitaire) [26].

**Composition and role:** Lycée-student organisations are managed by lycée students themselves, with their elected officials representing all lycée students, especially during negotiations and discussions within National Education bodies (CVL, CAVL, CNVL). Their role is to organise themselves as well as to promote and defend the rights and demands of lycée students, and to enable them to exercise citizenship by allowing them to express themselves on education-related matters: academic pace, reforming educational syllabuses and the educational system, etc., as well as societal challenges (jobs, social inequalities, pension reform, refugees, etc.).

Each lycée-student organisation defines its mode of organisation and functioning: those organisations can bring together federations, act at several levels (local and national), and have committees. Like student unions, they have sympathisers who cannot vote, unlike members who can elect their representatives. Lycée-student unions follow a variety of modes of organisation. They can also play a
role as information points for lycée students seeking answers regarding their education (the matter of exams, etc.).

**Financing:** Student unions are associations, so their rules of financing comply with rules and laws that apply to the community sector [27]. Their resources can be drawn from:

- subscriptions paid by members
- grants made by the State, regional councils, département councils, municipalities, public establishments for intermunicipal co-operation, and any other public structures
- donations and legacies
- various items of income from their activities, to the extent that they are not contrary to current laws and regulations.

**Other bodies**

France does not have a national youth assembly, but there are associations that have the aim of representing young people as well as defending their right and their place in society, especially in democratic bodies, such as the CNAJEP – Committee for National and International Relations between Youth and Non-Formal Education Associations (Comité pour les Relations Nationales et Internationales des Associations de Jeunesse et d’Éducation Populaire) and the FFJ – French Youth Forum (Forum Français de la Jeunesse).

- Committee for National and International Relations between Youth and Non-Formal Education Associations (Comité pour les Relations Nationales et Internationales des Associations de Jeunesse et d’Éducation Populaire)

The CNAJEP [28] is a non-profit association set up in 1968 under the law of 1 July 1901; it is a platform for youth and public-education associations. It is made up of 70 national movements that bring together 90 000 local associations and have 500 000 young people engaged in youth projects. It covers the whole of French territory, thanks in particular to a network of 23 regional committees (CRAJEP - Regional Committees of Youth and Non-Formal Education Associations (Comités Régionaux des Associations de Jeunesse et d’Éducation Populaire)) and at European level, through the European Youth Forum.

The CNAJEP’s role is to represent members to public authorities and within community-sector bodies. It defines itself as a “force for advocacy”, whence the stand it takes on “creating a right, from the age of 18, to lifelong education and training combined with resources”, and on working with associations to draw up public policies. The CNAJEP is also tasked with co-ordinating the “Structured Dialogue” (initiated by the European Commission).

- **The FFJ - French Youth Forum (Forum Français de la Jeunesse)**

The FFJ was set up in 2012. It is an independent assembly that has the aim of being a national forum for young people to be represented “by themselves”, as well as for exchanges and work on various societal challenges (ecology, youth representation, employment, health, etc.).
The FFJ’s instruments for action are issuing opinions, observations and proposals on societal debates and challenges, making referrals on those challenges to public authorities, action to recognise organisations managed by young people (with an average age of under 30), and monitoring youth matters. The members of the French Youth Forum (Forum Français de la Jeunesse) must meet certain criteria: the average age of the management of those associations must be less than 30, their functioning must be democratic, and they must be national in dimension.

The FFJ is made up of 16 associations gathered into 4 “colleges”: student, lycée student, supporter, and community. It has a facilitation committee made up of 4 titular representatives (and 4 substitutes), as well as a team of paid workers who co-ordinate and support the FFJ’s activities.

The FFJ actively supports the development of youth participation, which is the object of their report, “Le vote et la participation des jeunes en France” [“Youth voting and participation in France”], that sets out a number of proposals such as “developing training, information, and experimentation sites”, “facilitating approaches to encourage young people to express themselves”, and renewing democratic bodies.

Those two associations aim at representing young people in decision-making and consultative fora. Developing in parallel with them are more informal areas for mobilisation and participation put in place by young people themselves. The “Free Youth Parliaments” ("Parlements Libres des Jeunes") are examples of that.

- **“Free Youth Parliaments” (“Parlements Libres des Jeunes”)**

  Free Youth Parliaments (Parlements Libres de Jeunes) are the outcome of an experiment carried out in Rhône-Alpes region in 2013, on the initiative of a local association (Aequitaz), and which was subsequently spread across Ile-de-France region.

  The parliaments **generally bring together young people aged 18 to 30 from a range of social backgrounds and from several territories**; they meet over two days to debate a variety of topics. Those deliberative fora are based on an elaborate procedure: young people issue opinions and action plans within thematic commissions that are then voted on by all the “parliamentarians” (young people) at a plenary session. The various young people are chosen by the network of organiser associations. **The parliaments are self-financing, and organisers work on a pro bono basis.**

  The objective is to encourage the acquisition of civic skills, increase young people’s empowerment, and have them experience democracy. In his article entitled ‘Convergences et divergences des jeunesses dans une expérience délibérative. Le cas des “parlements libres des jeunes” ’ published in 2016, INJEP researcher Régis Cortesero described these parliaments as “a deliberative pathway that leads from expressing ‘the dreams and the anger’ of young people to co-constructing proposals [....].”

  **Free parliaments are based on principles of organisation** that are set out in a charter, including:

  1. “A free parliament is a regional meeting between young adults aged 18 to 30, although a few older individuals may participate. Only youths under 30 years old can vote where decisions are to be made. Each youth participates as a citizen, is responsible for his/her opinions and actions and participates on an equal footing whatever his/her status (isolated youth, youth welcomed...
into an institution, youth workers, etc.) or social standing, origin, gender, etc. This diversity is an essential condition of the Free parliament”.

2. “Local youth meetings inspired by, or in preparation of, Free youth parliaments can be organised. These are called Free youth assemblies”

3. “A Free parliament is a place in which youths can start [discussions] by sharing their dreams and expressing their anger […]”.

4. “A Free parliament is built in a free and creative (poetic) manner by allied people and organisations. A small group of 4 to 16 people from at least 3 different organisations including youths is one of the conditions for the success of a Free parliament”.

5. “A free parliament is not an institutional project: it is independent from public authorities (although a time for dialogue or for support from elected representatives or institutional decision-makers is possible and desirable)”