The public service of higher education comprises all post-secondary training courses. It meets general objectives with regard to raising the scientific, cultural and professional levels of the French nation and the individuals who make it up, major concerns being the reduction of social inequalities, equality between the sexes, development of research, and finally, construction of the European Higher Education and Research Area ([The law no. 2013-660 of 22 July 2013](https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000031992284&dateTexte=&categorieLien=id) on higher education and research (ESR) redefines the policy and management of higher education and research in France. It contributes to the success of all students, the growth and competitiveness of the economy and the creation of employment policy taking into account economic, social, environmental and cultural needs. It participates in the promotion and the spread of French-speaking in the world in addition to the reinforcement of interactions between science and society.

The French higher education system is characterised by the coexistence of a plurality of institutions which dispense higher education. They belong to various legal categories, defined in the French Code of Education ([book VII](https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichCode.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000007131459&dateTexte=&categorieLien=id)):

- Universities;
- Schools and institutes outside of universities;
- Higher education institutions, French schools abroad and “Grands Établissements” (major institutions);
- "Communautés d’universités et établissements" (COMUE - Communities of Universities and Schools)

These institutions dispense courses with a variety of aims and admission requirements. Although the obtainment of the [baccalauréat](https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichCodeArticle.do?cidArticle=JORFTEXT000007131459&idTexte=JORFTEXT000007131459&dateTexte=2013-07-22) (or its equivalent or exemption) is a necessary condition for access to any higher course of studies, it is not necessarily enough for admission to certain types of courses. Distinctions may therefore be made between:

- courses for which there is no selective admission; i.e. university courses. Enrolment takes place at the beginning of the Bachelor's degree;
- courses for which students are selected on the basis of their application forms: [classes préparatoires aux grandes écoles](https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichCodeArticle.do?cidArticle=JORFTEXT000007131459&idTexte=JORFTEXT000007131459&dateTexte=2013-07-22) (CPGE - classes preparing for admission to the "Grandes écoles"), which are selective higher education institutions which recruit their pupils through a competitive examination, [sections de techniciens supérieurs](https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichCodeArticle.do?cidArticle=JORFTEXT000007131459&idTexte=JORFTEXT000007131459&dateTexte=2013-07-22) (STS - Advanced vocational courses), courses dispensed in [instituts universitaires de technologie](https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichCodeArticle.do?cidArticle=JORFTEXT000007131459&idTexte=JORFTEXT000007131459&dateTexte=2013-07-22) (IUT - University institutes of technology), in [instituts universitaires professionnalisés](https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichCodeArticle.do?cidArticle=JORFTEXT000007131459&idTexte=JORFTEXT000007131459&dateTexte=2013-07-22) (IUP - University institutes of professional education), in [Écoles Supérieures du Professorat et de l'Éducation](https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichCodeArticle.do?cidArticle=JORFTEXT000007131459&idTexte=JORFTEXT000007131459&dateTexte=2013-07-22) (ESPE - Higher Schools for Teaching and Education) and in Specialised schools;
- courses for which admission is granted through a competitive examination, carried out in the ["Grandes Écoles"](https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichCodeArticle.do?cidArticle=JORFTEXT000007131459&idTexte=JORFTEXT000007131459&dateTexte=2013-07-22).
cycles (Bachelor's degree, Master's degree and Doctorate) and based on ECTS credits, in compliance with the Bologna Process principles.

**System Governance** is ensured by a contractual policy set up by the State with the institutions, which have administrative and budgetary autonomy. The policy has been through considerable development in recent years, under the influence of the **law of 10 August 2007 bearing on the liberties and responsibilities of universities** [1], the LRU law or the Pécresse law in addition to the promulgation of the law on higher education and research (ESR) in 2013.

**Pôles de recherche et d'enseignement supérieur** (PRES - Higher Education and Research Hubs) were created in 2006 by planning law no.2006-450 of 18 April 2006 [1] in order to offer a more understandable research system and one that is better adapted to regions' needs. They have enabled a site policy to be initiated in France and a policy of pooling together the resources and activities of universities, "Grandes Écoles" and research organisations.

With the application of the ESR law in 2013, a new type of hub was put in place, with the objective of extending this site strategy. This creates the **Communautés d'Universités et Établissements** (COMUE - Communities of Universities and Schools), which replace the PRES. The reform leads to the decompartmentalisation of lycées [2] and universities, the signing of site contracts between the Secretary of State for Higher education and Research and the COMUEs. Approximately thirty site contracts will emerge from a process that will include the appropriate local authorities (régions, départements and metropolitan areas) and stakeholders from the socio-economic world.

The ESR Law also calls for broadening the competences of the **Conseil National de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche** (CNESER - National Council for Higher education and Research). This Council is consulted on higher education and research policy and may be required to intervene in disciplinary matters. A new **Conseil Stratégique de la Recherche** (C.S.R. - Strategic Council for Research) has also been created: it defines the broad outlines of the strategic agenda, France Europe 2020, for research, transfer and innovation. Reporting to the French Prime Minister, the C.S.R. brings together scientists and high level French and international experts, as well as figures from the socio-economic and political world.

Moreover, university governance has become more democratic and more collegial. A new independent administrative authority has been put in place, in order to evaluate institutions, research units and courses. This is the **Haut Conseil de l'Évaluation de la Recherche et de l'Enseignement Supérieur** (High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education) which replaces the Agence d’Évaluation de la Recherche et de l’Enseignement Supérieur (Evaluating Agency for Research and Higher Education). The law also replaces the **Conseil Scientifique** (CS - Scientific Council) and the **Conseil des Formations et de la Vie Étudiante** (CFVU - Council for Studies and Student Life) with the Conseil académique (Academic Council). This body is now responsible for examining individual matters concerning the recruitment, posting and careers of research-teaching staff.

One year after the passing of the law, it has led to real progress, including:

- improving career orientation mechanisms, shifting from an imposed to a chosen career orientation;
- simplifying the range of training courses, to make them more accessible and understandable for young people, families, employers and foreign students;
- implementing the FUN Platform, **France Université Numérique** [2], opening 98 MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) as of March 6th 2015;
- improving the gender equality recognition,
• creating the *Pôles Étudiants pour l’Innovation, le Transfert et l’Entrepreneuriat* [2] (PEPITE - Student Clusters for Innovation, Transfer and Entrepreneurship);
• simplifying intellectual property.

On 22 July 2014, two thirds of the implementation decrees of the ESR Law were published. The last third was pending approval by the State Council.

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**Links**