

World Education News and Reviews

March/April 2004

France

Legislative Framework

Prior to the recent changes and reforms prompted by the signing of the Bologna Declaration, French higher education was largely governed by the 1968 *Loi d'Orientation d'Education* and the Savary Act of 1984, which encouraged greater institutional autonomy, introduced the concept of the binary (academic and vocational) system of education, and presided over a large increase in the numbers of students attending institutions of higher education. Between 1980 and 2000 the number of university students increased by 72 percent.

Although no new higher education acts have been passed since 1984, the government began introducing Bologna-inspired reforms beginning in 1999 culminating with the 2002 publication of a new set of regulations aimed at "harmonizing" the French system with the European Higher Education Area. As part of these reforms France introduced the **Licence Professionnelle** and the **Master** (both in 1999) with the aim of improving the transparency of the education system while meeting the demands of an increasingly unified European labor market.

Attempts to formalize these changes in recent months have met with stiff opposition from students and faculty who mobilized mass protests in December prompting the temporary withdrawal of the reform laws "on university modernization," which would codify the so-called LMD (*licence, master, doctorat* — bachelor, master, doctorate) representing three, five and eight years respectively of post-secondary university study. It should be noted, however, that the protests did not specifically protest the LMD structure (which has already been implemented), rather the financial implications for students who see the new structure and other stipulations within the proposed legislation as a forerunner to increased privatization, a reduction in public financing of higher education, and an attempt to undermine the fundamental concepts of education as a public service.

1. Easily Readable and Comparable Degrees

- France ratified the Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region in 1999.
- Regulations issued in 2002 call for the mandatory issuance of the [diploma supplement](#) for all students engaging in study abroad. If requested, the diploma supplement should be made available as an annex to qualifications for all students graduating from French institutions of higher education. The [Ministry of Youth, National Education and Research](#) has established a task force to actively promote the widespread use of the supplement.
- The [Centre d'Information sur la Reconnaissance des Diplomes Etrangers en France](#), a branch of the education ministry, acts as the French [ENIC/NARIC](#).

2. Degree Structure

- Reform measures began in 1999 with the decision to make the **Licence** a genuine terminal degree relevant to the labor market, and to launch the **Licence Professionnelle** (vocational first-cycle degree) and the *mastaire*. In April 2002, the government signed several legal texts pertaining, amongst other matters, to the introduction of a 3+2 structure in the universities, defined by the *licence* and **Master** (formerly *mastaire*) starting in academic year 2002/2003. To understand the new structure of higher education, one must still be familiar with the traditional structure, because they effectively exist in parallel. Below we have outlined the French system of higher education before the Bologna Declaration, and the reform measures implemented since.

Traditional Structure

Stage I: The first cycle on the university academic track is two years in length and leads to the **Diplôme d'Etudes Universitaires Générales** (DEUG). The DEUG is seen as the preparatory diploma for the second cycle. University students may also enroll in the **Diplôme d'Etudes Universitaires Scientifiques et Techniques** (DEUST), a two-year

scientific course leading directly to professional employment, or as a prerequisite to the new *licence professionnelle* and *master professionnel*. In addition, university institutes of technology (IUT) offer short, two-year technical programs leading to the **Diplôme Universitaire de Technologie** (DUT) or the **Brevet de Technicien Supérieur** (BTS), which can be followed by a one-year course leading to the national diploma in specialized technology (DNTS), and now the new *licence professionnelle*. The first cycle of classes at *écoles supérieures* – **Classes Préparatoires aux Grandes Ecoles** (CPGE) – are also two years in length and are meant as preparation for the competitive entrance examinations for the *grandes écoles*. These programs are generally recognized by universities as being equivalent to the DEUG in most subjects.

Stage II: This stage provides academic training at the advanced level and prepares students for a profession. The degree of *licence* is awarded after one year of study in the humanities, science and technology, engineering, law and economics. The *licence* is now commonly considered the equivalent of a bachelor's in international terms, and represents the first stage of the three-cycle licence/master/doctorat (LMD, 3-5-8), introduced from 2002 to increase the international comparability of French qualifications. One year of study after the *licence* leads to the *maîtrise* in arts and sciences. In management and technology, students who hold a DEUG can study directly for the *maîtrise*, which is awarded after two years.

Stage III: The professional third cycle of post-secondary education requires a high degree of specialization and research leading to the one-year **Diplôme d'Etudes Supérieures Spécialisées** (DESS) and the **Diplôme de Recherche Technologique** (DRT). Students on the academic track who successfully complete one year of study after the *maîtrise* are awarded the **Diplôme d'Etudes Approfondies** (DEA) and may continue on for the *doctorat* which usually takes between three to four years.

NEW SYSTEM

- The new structure of the three-cycle system of tertiary education in France is now commonly referred to as the *licence*, *master*, *doctorat*, or L-M-D, in reference to the three qualifications available after 3,5 and 8 years of study respectively.

Stage I

- The *licence* concludes the first cycle of university study and it is now considered the equivalent of the European bachelor's degree. The *licence* is awarded after students have successfully completed 180 ECTS credits (three years full-time study). The study period is now split into six semesters. It is important to note that in the interim the diplomas offered at the Bac + 2 level (DEUG, DUT...) will continue to be awarded.
- On the vocational track, a new third year of study was introduced in 1999, and a new qualification, the *licence professionnelle*, is awarded after the successful completion of three years of post-secondary study. The additional one year of study is offered to students who have successfully completed a DUT or BTS program. Students who earn the *licence professionnelle* can continue on to the new two-year *master professionnel* program. The *licence professionnelle* degrees were first awarded in 2000.

Stage II

- The *master* (**diplôme national de master, à finalité recherche ou finalité professionnelle** - professional master, or research master - the latter possibly requiring an internship) is awarded to students who have successfully completed five years (300 ECTS post-secondary education or 120 ECTS beyond the *licence*) of study beyond the *baccalaureat*, thereby maintaining the concept of a 'Bac+5'. It was introduced into the system with effect from academic year 2002/2003. At present, there are some pilot projects running that offer master degrees of 60 credits, building on the existing *maîtrise* level of 240 credits. (The new master's degree was first introduced in 1999 and was originally titled the *mastaire*. To avoid confusion the *mastaire* was renamed 'master' in April 2002.)
- The new degree provides a single designation covering a range of state-recognized diplomas or qualifications earned five years after the *baccalaureat*. Such qualifications include the *diplôme d'études supérieures spécialisées* (DESS), the *diplôme d'ingénieur*, the *diplôme d'études approfondies* (DEA), and the Bac + 5 diplomas awarded by the business schools. Please note that none of the existing qualifications will be abolished but will be awarded in conjunction with the master. For example, a *Diplôme d'Ingénieur* issued after 2002 will also bear the title *Grade de Master*.
- The new master's degree will be offered at all French institutions of higher education (*grandes écoles* and universities), regardless of their supervisory ministry, classification and curriculum. For the first time in France, qualifications earned from universities and those obtained from *grandes écoles* will have the same designation. This reform measure is aimed at promoting greater cooperation between these institutions and institutions abroad, while preserving the identity of the different components of the French system.

- In terms of applying the new bachelor/master framework it is now up to the institutions of higher education to redefine and reorganize their programs. The newly reorganized programs will be assessed and *habilitation* (accreditation) will be awarded on the basis of the assessment by the *Conseil National de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche*. The reforms will be introduced gradually with full effect expected for academic year 2005/2006. Medicine and related areas will be excluded from these reforms for the time being.

3. Credit Transfer

- The use of the ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) is required by the ministerial decree of April 2002 and it applies to all institutions of higher education with official authorization to deliver national diplomas.
- It is expected that all institutions will have adopted and implemented ECTS as a transfer and accumulation system by 2005.

4. Mobility

- Under the [Erasmus](#) program, France sent the largest number of students overseas to study (18,149) in academic year 2001/2002, and in terms of the aggregate incoming/outgoing total (35,919) was second only to Spain.
- In terms of funding, the government has enacted a number of initiatives under the Action Plan for Mobility: The 'Erasmus top-up' supplements the grants supplied by the Erasmus program to students who are eligible for the program; the creation in 2001 of means-tested 'mobility grants' aimed at promoting professional training abroad.
- The most popular destinations for French students participating in European mobility programs are the United Kingdom, Spain, Germany, Italy and Ireland.

5. Quality Assurance

- The [Comité National d'Evaluation](#) (CNE) was established under the 1984 Higher Education Law. A law of 1989 made the CNE an autonomous administrative entity, which reports directly to the President of the Republic and thus is not under the authority of the higher education minister.
- Launched in the early 1990s, institutional accreditation is awarded on a four-year basis and is based on the results of an internal and external assessment.
- CNE has completed an initial evaluation of all universities and has embarked on a second round of evaluations.
- Engineering schools and the programs they offer are assessed every six years by the [Commission des Titres d'Ingénieur](#) (Commission for Graduate Engineers). The Commission d'Evaluation des Formations et des Diplômes de Gestion (Commission for the Evaluation of Management Courses and Degrees) was established in 2001 and awards six-year accreditations to competent schools and programs.
- CNE is a member of the [European Network for Quality Assurance](#).

6. Promotion of European Dimensions in Higher Education

- The [Université Franco-Allemande](#) (UFA) was created in 1997 by an intergovernmental agreement. It is funded jointly by the French and German governments, and has a scattered campus with headquarters in Sarrebruck. In partnership with the 133 French and German institutions in its network, the UFA organizes joint doctoral studies and research. There are 115 integrated courses in France and Germany: architecture, law, economy/business studies, human and social sciences, sciences/mathematics/IT, and engineering sciences, which currently lead to two national diplomas (a double diploma). The UFA is in charge of setting up a single Franco-German diploma. In the 2003/2004 academic year 4,748 students are enrolled at the UFA of whom some 2,451 are currently in the partner country.
- The [Université Franco-Italienne](#) (UFI) was set up in 2000, to be followed by other similar projects currently being considered with the Netherlands. UFI's French headquarters is located in Grenoble. UFI is at the fulcrum of numerous academic collaboration projects involving France and Italy, encouraging projects and activities that facilitate the award of joint degrees, co-tutored doctorates and joint research projects.

- In September 2004, [Transmanche University](#), a collaboration of four Breton universities with the University of Kent, will enroll students into interdisciplinary, bilingual, joint degree programs in a wide range of subjects.

— Nick Clark
March 2004

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