

France

Introduction

According to the analysis in St Aubyn et al. (2009), the French tertiary education system is located below efficiency level. The system is relatively more efficient if teaching is considered than in what concerns research.

Historical evolution has resulted in a wide diversity of tertiary education institutions. There are two main tiers in the education system, the "*grandes écoles*", more specialised in specific subjects, relatively better-endowed and with strict selection, and the Universities where access is unrestricted but a *de facto* selection takes place after the first year of studies with 50% of students changing area of study, failing or dropping out.

Table - Summary of indicators in St Aubyn et al. (2009)

	Average ISI citation		Recruiter review		Peer review	
	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank
FR	4,21	10	1,14	10	1,23	10
best performer	NL - 5,51	1	IE - 2	1	FI - 2	1
worst performer	RO - 1,63	26	CZ -1,06	16	GR - 1,02	16

	Funding rules		Staff policy		Evaluation	
	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank
FR	6,60	2	1,8	18	5,6	11
best performer	PT - 7,8	1	CZ, DK, NL, AT, SK, SE,	1	HU - 8,3	1
worst performer	SK - 2,9	18	FR - 1,8	18	GR - 2,3	18

	Academic staff	Students	Graduates	Publications	Students	Graduates	Graduates
			<i>per capita</i>		<i>per academic staff</i>	<i>per academic staff</i>	<i>per student</i>
FR	1,8	29,1	9,0	0,3	16,5	5,1	30,8
EU27	1,9	33,7	7,1	0,6	17,8	3,7	19,8

	PISA	
	Score 2000*	Rank
FR	507	8
best performer	FI - 540	1
worst performer	RO - 410	18

Indicators

In quantitative terms, the number of academic staff and students per capita are both below average. Graduations are above average and there was an increase in the graduation rate of cohorts born between 1978 and 1982. On the quality of teaching, the available indicators are below average.

The ratio of students per academic staff is well below average which suggests a quality of the learning experience for students on average. France has above average graduates per academic staff and the second largest number of graduates per student. The high average graduation rate is partly explained by development of short duration programmes.

Despite these overall good results, the percentage of dropout between 2005 and 2007 was 20% and the high failure rate is a source of policy concern.

Scientific production is below average in number of publications but its quality, as measured by the citations index, is above-average.

The score in funding rules is very good. Budgets are based on objectives and evaluation.

The score on evaluation is about average.

The score on staff policy is the lowest. There are different types of contracts with different recruitment and remuneration arrangements. There is segmentation between those with civil servant statute and those under short-term contracts with flexible hiring and firing rules.

Since the 2007 reform, there were a number of governance changes which are not reflected in the indicators above. Changes include the opening of managing boards, an annual report of activity by institutions, and more responsibility in financial and human resources matters. The changes are taking place within a governance system characterised to a large extent by central planning. The autonomy of universities to set their curriculum appears limited due to the choice to favour national diplomas.

The growing share of foreign students, with increasing numbers from Asia and other EU countries, is an indication of the attractiveness of the French tertiary education system.

Policy developments

The main reforms recently implemented are as follows:

- Foster the *employability of University graduates*: the 2007 law stresses the role of Universities in student orientation and employability and requires Universities to publish statistics on exam pass rates and the employability of graduates. The recent reform of the research tax credit should facilitate the employability of PhD graduates in the private sector.
- Improve the *success rate at University*: a plan for success at bachelor degree level (2008-2010) finances additional teaching, supervision or tutorials for undergraduate students. The Government has also improved the information about orientation, opportunities offered by different tracks, skills required and possibilities to switch between tracks (via the internet).
- Strengthen the *evaluation* of institutions and the allocation of funding based on *performance*: the allocation of funding across institutions is based on activity (80%) and performance (20%).
- Increase the international visibility of French Universities: the 2006 Law for research creates the possibility to establish Centres for Research and Higher Education regrouping higher education and research institutions. Graduate engineering schools are being involved in research activity (in particular within the centres of research and of higher education) to encourage students to enrol in PhD courses (as the number of PhD students is projected to decrease from 70,000 in 2007 to 47,500 in 2017, as a result of demographic change (through 2012) and a steeper decline in enrolments in higher education, particularly in universities. This decrease particularly affects scientific disciplines within universities, medical tracks excepted.
- A Plan to make the career of researcher-lecturer more attractive (2008).

There is a recognised need of additional resources, in particular larger private contributions. Currently, the financing of higher education is provided mainly by public sources - mainly State funding (83.7% of the total in 2008). 16.3% of funding is from private sources (9.6% from individuals and 6.7% from businesses). France introduced the possibility to create Foundations to provide greater flexibility for education institutions to attract private funds, but their impact cannot be estimated yet.

One of the current debates concerns an increase in enrolment fees combined with the set up of a loan system with repayment contingent on income (with a threshold below which repayment would not be required).

The Minister for Higher Education mandated a mission to analyse possible measures to strengthen excellence in French Universities (mission of Philippe Aghion). The preliminary report (January 2010) recommends the coordinated use of three elements: (i) reinforce the autonomy of institutions in the fields of pedagogy and management of human and financial resources, (ii) significantly increase the financial resources during several years and (iii) use incentives, especially as concerns research funding.