

# France

## Demographics for France

Population:	60,656,178 (July 2005 est.)
GDP (by PPP method):	US\$1.737 trillion
Currency (inc code):	Euro (EUR)
Language(s):	French
Internet country code:	.fr

## Primary and secondary education

School in France is compulsory until the age of 16.

French school begins with the pre-elementary level (ages two to six), which prepares children for elementary school.

Elementary school (Ecole primaire): from 11th to 7th form (ages six to 11) teaches basic reading, writing and mathematical skills.

Secondary school (Ecole secondaire): from the 6th to 3rd form (ages ten to 14). It aims at helping students to master language and acquire new knowledge by developing logical thought, powers of observation, and writing skills. Secondary school leads to the “Brevet des collèges”, an exam based on the main disciplines taught at school and which qualifies pupils to enter high school.

High school (Lycée): three years, from 2nd to final form (ages 15-18). Continues studies established in secondary school. Second form courses are uniform for all pupils. First form courses are tailored to the student’s university ambitions. The main high school specializations are: literature (L), mathematics (S), economics (ES), and management (G). High school graduation leads to the Baccalaureat diploma, a prerequisite for entering higher education in France.

## **Higher education**

Higher education in France is world-renowned for its quality and accessibility. Tuition at public schools is paid for by the French government. Admission and promotion is through a system of merit-based examinations. Thus, intellectually qualified students are ensured a fair chance of pursuing their educational goals, regardless of their financial or social status.

French universities enrol over 1.5 million students. International students make up about 10 percent of total enrolments, one of the highest percentages among OECD countries.

Universities offer academic, technical, and professional degree programs in all disciplines, preparing students for careers in research and professional practice in every imaginable field.

University programs consist of general programs (languages and literature, art, law, the humanities, science, etc.) and professionally-oriented programs in all fields: management and business, services, communication, science and industrial techniques, etc.

### *Licence level*

The licence degree is awarded after six semesters of higher education and requires 180 “credits”. Students specialise progressively in their chosen field: literature, law, economics, mathematics, physics, philosophy, history and so on. In addition to the general licence degrees, there are the recently created licences professionnelles. These are closer to the job market and provide specialization in numerous sectors.

### *Master level*

The master is awarded after four semesters and requires 120 “credits”. It has two main orientations:

1. Master professionnel (Professional Master’s), intended to qualify students for entry into working life.
2. Master recherche (Research Master’s), which essentially opens the way to a Doctorate.

### *Doctorate level*

The Doctorate can be taken after a Research Master’s. Three (or more) years of doctoral studies follow after acceptance of the research topic by a supervisor: including thesis writing, seminars and periods of research and related activities.

### *Admission to the French higher education system*

First year students normally enter university with the Baccalaureat, students who have followed a different route may still be admitted if their qualifications are equivalent.

Overseas students follow a procedure for admission to a French University and must obtain a visa/residence permit. Students should contact the French Embassy to apply for a visa and contact the Cultural Department of the French Embassy, in October/November for admission procedures.

#### *Admission to a Grande Ecole*

There are roughly 200 “Grandes Ecoles”. Admission to one is selective and the procedure is designed by the Grande Ecole itself. There are two main procedures based on either previous academic qualification or on a competitive examination (concours). In the latter case, the students must prepare the concours by spending two years in special training courses called “classes préparatoires”. To enter a “classe préparatoire” students must hold the Baccalaureat, preferably with distinction, with top grades in the subjects to be studied.

### **Structure of business and management education**

#### *Public universities*

The teaching of management is mainly via a national network of Institut d’Administration des Entreprises (IAEs) inside the public universities. These institutes (30 in France) are relatively autonomous inside French universities and they mainly give state degrees to their participants (Bachelor, Master’s or PhD) but they can also grant Master of Business Administration (MBA) or university diplomas. Faculty members are civil servants and may be of various nationalities.

IAEs are also involved in the doctoral programs and are often strongly involved in research in management. The most renowned are located in Paris (University of Paris I – La Sorbonne), and Aix-en-Provence (University Paul Cézanne, Aix-Marseille III). Tuition fees are generally low in these public business schools because they are heavily subsidized by the French Ministry of Higher Education.

#### *Private business schools (Ecoles de Commerce)*

There are more than 100 business schools offering a three-year program after the “classes préparatoires” or a four-year programme after the Baccalaureat diploma. The business schools’ curriculum builds on a common foundation course and leads to specializations such as auditing, finance, marketing, international trade, human resources and accountancy. Tuition fees can vary widely but generally range from €3,000 to €6,000 per year.

*MS (specialist Master’s Degree):* Students can choose from 260 MS subjects at approximately 100 engineering and business schools. The course duration is 12 to 15 months. An MS qualification is not so much a full diploma as a standard of excellence. Entry requirements: at least five years HE and one degree-level qualification. Applicants are considered on the basis of their

academic record, an interview and the results of written and oral tests. Tuition fees are around €9,000.

*MBA*: Unlike an MS degree, the MBA is a general qualification recognised all over the world. Basic MBA subjects include marketing, finance, management and human resources. The course duration is one or two years. Entry requirements: at least five years' HE and one degree-level qualification, plus a minimum of two years' experience in industry. Applications will be examined by an admissions committee. Tuition fees range from €7,500 to €43,500.

The most prestigious French public and private business schools have MBA programs, many of which are accredited by EQUIS and AMBA and sometimes AACSB. MBA programs are aimed primarily at young international managers. Instruction is strongly oriented toward professional practice, drawing heavily on students' experience.

Many French MBA programs are taught in English. Classes tend to include students of many nationalities. In fact, their international orientation and flavour are among the strengths of French programs.

Teaching in English is becoming more developed and bilingual programs in management allow foreign students who want to study in France, to attend courses that are taught in English during the first semester for instance and then participate in regular French management courses during the second semester.

France has around 230 free-standing, private schools of business and management, many of which are affiliated with chambers of commerce and industry.

International students who have completed two years of post-secondary education may apply for admission, sit for the entrance examination, and in three years earn a business degree. Graduates may go on for an MBA or specialized master's.

Among the best-known private schools of business and management are the Ecole des Hautes Etudes Commerciales, known as HEC, the Ecole Supérieure de Commerce de Paris (ESCP-EAP), the Ecole Supérieure nationale de Sciences Economiques et Commerciales (ESSEC), the Ecole des Hautes Etudes Commerciales du Nord (EDHEC Lille), and the Ecole de Management de Lyon (EM Lyon).

### **Most important issues facing business schools in the country**

The main challenge facing public and private business schools in France is to acquire a sufficient level of autonomy in order to define their missions and to design their strategy according to the priorities that they have established.

In fact tuition fees are relatively low compared to other high quality management education systems around the world. For this reason, public or private institutions have to find subsidies from the state or from other

institutions such as chambers of commerce. In order to obtain these subsidies business schools have to comply with different constraints which are often considered as non-compatible with their original mission by accreditation organizations.

Private and public business schools alike face a more and more important worldwide competition. In general, French business schools benefit from a European environment in which constructing a very good network is quite easy and very profitable not only to European students themselves (through the Erasmus exchange programs) but also to all students who come from non-European countries.

Adaptation to the Bologna process remains a major challenge for private business schools but it will only take a few years in order to enforce the new system in their curricula. Through the Bologna process, European and non-European students have the opportunity to pursue their degrees in various European countries and various business school networks with a complete recognition of the credits that are needed in order to comply with academic requirements.

Finally, the development of research activities is very often a major requirement of quality and French business schools must have a strong commitment to academic research. It is a very good way to attract the best professors of management from all over the world. It also helps the business schools to develop support and partnerships with international companies.

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