

Education system

France

described and compared with
the Dutch system

This document contains information on the education system of France. We explain the Dutch equivalent of the most common qualifications from France for the purpose of admission to Dutch higher education.

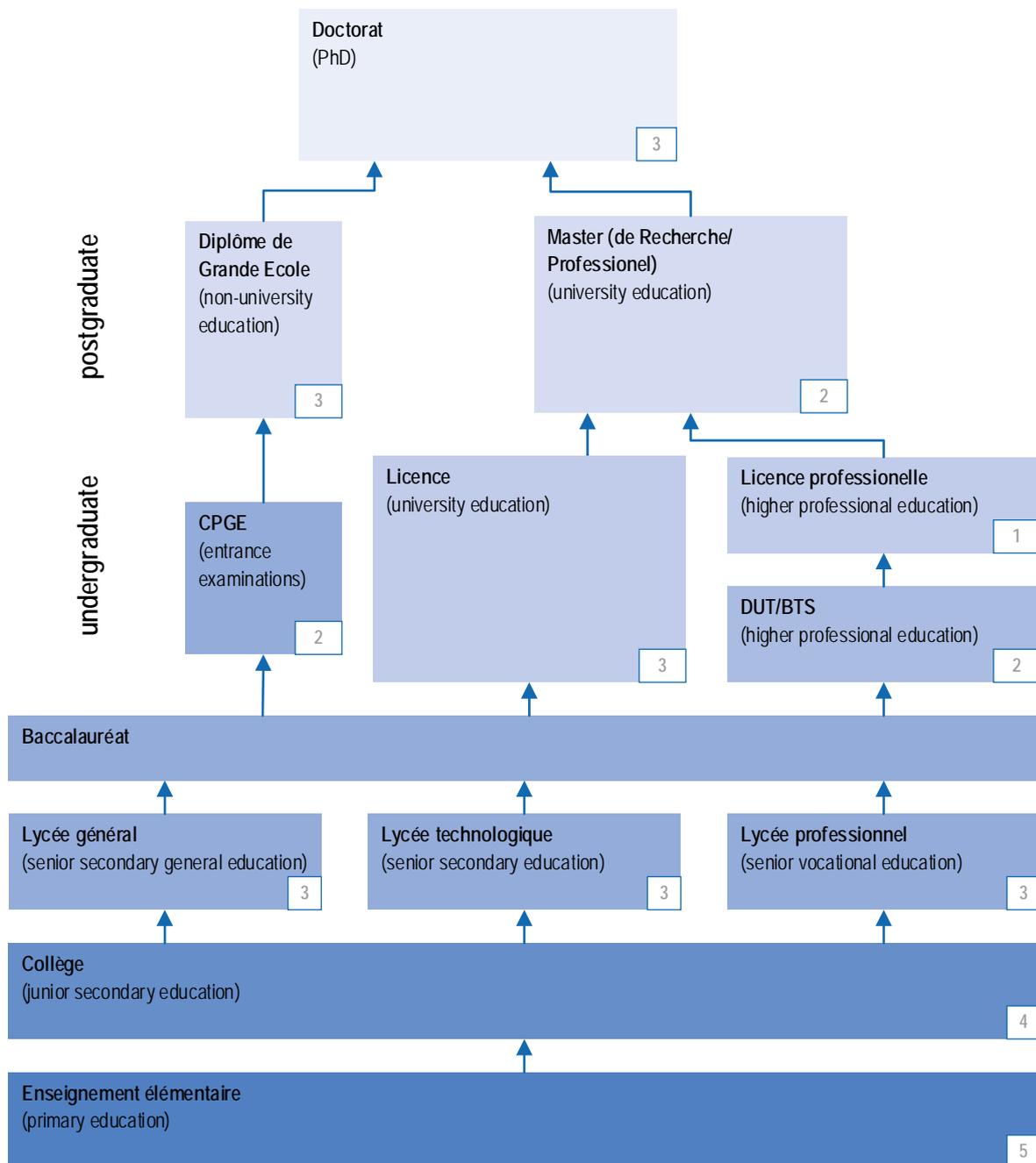
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We assemble the information for these descriptions of education systems with the greatest care. However, we cannot be held responsible for the consequences of errors or incomplete information in this document.



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Education system France



0 Duration of education

■ National Framework of Qualifications

French 5-level structure	EQF
I – Doctoral grade	8
I – Master grade	7
II – Bachelor grade	6
III	5
IV	4
V	3
Not applicable	2
Not applicable	1

Source: France - European inventory on [NQF 2014](#)

■ Evaluation chart

The left-hand column in the table below lists the most common foreign qualifications with corresponding levels in the national qualifications framework. The other columns show the Dutch equivalent along with the corresponding levels in the Dutch and European qualifications frameworks.

Degree or qualification and NFQ level	EQF level	Dutch equivalent and NLQF level		EQF level
<i>Baccalauréat Professionnel</i>	4	4	MBO diploma (qualification level 4)	4
<i>Baccalauréat Technologique</i>	4	4	VWO diploma, or in some cases HAVO diploma with vocational subjects	4+/ 4
<i>Baccalauréat Général</i>	4	4	VWO diploma	4+
<i>Brevet de Technicien Supérieur (BTS)</i>	3	5	2 years of HBO	5
<i>Diplôme Universitaire de Technologie (DUT)</i>	3	5	2 years of HBO	5
<i>Licence Professionnelle</i>	2	6	HBO bachelor's degree	6
<i>Licence</i>	2	6	HBO or WO bachelor's degree	6
<i>Master de Recherche</i>	1	7	WO master's degree	7
<i>Master Professionnel</i>	1	7	WO master's degree, in some cases HBO master's degree	7
<i>Diplôme de Grande Ecole</i>	1	7	WO master's degree, in some cases HBO master's degree	7

NB

- The information provided in the table is a general recommendation from which no rights may be derived.
- NFQ = French National Framework of Qualifications. NLQF = Dutch Qualifications Framework. EQF = European Qualifications Framework.
- The [EQF/NLQF level](#) is not so much a reflection of study load or content; rather, it is an indication of a person's knowledge and skills after having completed a certain programme of study.

Education system France

- Information about Dutch equivalent qualifications can be found on our website: [the Dutch education system](#).
- [The Cooperation Organisation for Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market \(SBB\)](#), evaluates statements on foreign qualifications and training at VMBO and MBO level. The evaluation may vary if SBB evaluates the diploma for admission to VET schools or the labour market in the Netherlands.

■ Introduction

France is a republic with a centralized political system. The country is divided into 100 departments, 96 of which are located in France and 4 beyond French borders (the so-called *oultre-mer*).

In terms of administration, France is divided into 30 educational districts (*académies*), where most educational policy is carried out. Each *académie* is presided over by a *recteur* with a seat in the *rectorat* appointed by the state as the official representative of the Minister of Education. The *recteur* carries full responsibility for all primary and secondary educational matters in the *académie*, including teacher training, and supervises national examinations and the award of diplomas in these sectors.

Higher education is the responsibility of the *Ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la recherche* (Ministry of Higher Education and Research). Following the reforms of 1968, the system was officially divided into a university education sector and a *Grandes Ecoles* sector designed for enrolling the best students to be trained in a specific profession. In legal terms, the universities are autonomous interdisciplinary institutions that offer academic education and research. Universities are regulated by national legislation.

Grandes Ecoles is a collective term for selective specialist schools geared to technical higher education (*Ecole polytechnique*, *Ecole Centrale*, *Ponts et Chaussés* and other engineering schools), general administration (*Ecole Nationale d'Administration*), business studies (*HEC* and other business schools), agricultural higher education (*Institut National Agronomique*) and other prestigious establishments (*SciencesPo*, *Ecole Normale Supérieure*), outside the state university system. The *Grandes Ecoles* have a different status in comparison to universities: they may or may not be state institutions, with programmes that may or may not lead to national degrees or certificates awarded by the institution. In general, medical and legal programmes are provided at the universities, engineering programmes are offered at the *Grandes Ecoles*.

In France, the private sector holds a strong position in higher education. Many of the *Grandes Ecoles* are private institutions. Some however are national institutions, under the Ministry of Education, some may be private or regulated by other ministries, or offer programmes for which this is the case.

Education in France is compulsory for children aged 6-16. The language of instruction is French. The academic/school year runs from September/October until the end of June. The academic year is divided into semesters.

■ Primary and secondary education

Secondary education in France, after 5 years of primary education, is known as *enseignement secondaire* and consists of a 4-year *collège* (lower secondary) and a 3-year *lycée* (upper secondary).

After completion of lower secondary education, students are awarded the *Diplôme National du Brevet des Collèges*. Upper secondary education leads to the award of the *Diplôme du Baccalauréat*, which can be obtained at a *lycée général*, *lycée technologique* or a *lycée professionnel*:

1. *Lycée général: Diplôme du Baccalauréat Général/Baccalauréat de l'Enseignement du Second Degré*. This diploma is awarded at the end of one of three general tracks:
 - *Série L (Littéraire)*
 - *Série ES (Economique et Social)*
 - *Série S (Scientifique)*

2. *Lycée technologique: Diplôme du Baccalauréat Technologique*. This diploma combines general subjects with a practical component.

The followed track is stated on the diploma.

In terms of level, the *Baccalauréat Général* (NFQ level 4/EQF level 4) is comparable to a VWO diploma.

In terms of level, the *Baccalauréat Technologique* (NFQ level 4/EQF level 4) is comparable to a VWO diploma, in some cases to a HAVO diploma with vocational subjects, depending on the subjects taken.

Students can also complete a vocational stream in secondary education, at a *lycée professionnel* leading to a *Baccalauréat Professionnel*. This programme is geared to the labour market. A small percentage of graduates go on to further education, mostly to short-track, specialised higher professional education programmes.

In terms of level, the *Baccalauréat Professionnel* (NFQ level 4/EQF level 4) is comparable to a MBO diploma at qualification level 4.

■ Admission to higher education

By law the 3 types of *Baccalauréat* gives access to higher education at a university. Admission to the *Grandes Ecoles* and most other (often specialist) institutions is based upon a personal interview and generally, a selective entrance examination. A 1 to 2-year programme to prepare for these exams is taken at special *lycées*, the so-called *classes préparatoires*, after the *Baccalauréat*. In 2007, students from these *classes préparatoires* are awarded 60 ECTS for each year. Students may also sit for these exams after successfully completing the first cycle of higher education.

■ Higher education

There is a large variety of institutions and diplomas in French higher education. In principle, there are 2 types of higher education – university education and education at specialist institutions, both private and public, among which the *Grandes Ecoles*. – Both types award recognised and non-recognised qualifications. There are also various shorter forms of higher education.

The system has a 3-tier structure: known as the *LMD* system: *Licence*, *Master*, *Doctorat* (3, 2 and 3 years respectively).

The *Baccalauréat* gives access to the first cycle programme. This is the first (statutory) degree.¹ obtained upon completion of secondary school. This diploma is a requirement for access to higher education. Admission to a next cycle is granted on the basis of the diploma obtained and personal selection.

■ University education

France has nearly 90 national and private universities. Following the Bologna Process, the most recent higher education legislation came into force in 2002 (the *Décret n°2002-482 du 8 avril 2002*), implementing the three-tier *LMD* structure: *Licence*, *Master*, *Doctorat*.

The system was introduced gradually (2002-2006) and applies to all national institutions. As of 2006, all universities have organized their programmes according to this system.

The 2 types of university qualifications, i.e. national diplomas and diplomas issued by institutions, have remain unchanged.

¹ The French term grade indicates a certain grade in terms of level of education attained that is not linked to a specific field of study; the degree is awarded once a diploma (*diplôme* is a protected term in France) has been obtained in a particular field of study.

The former are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Higher Education and Research; the latter (such as a *Diplôme d'Université*) are issued by the institutions themselves.

French higher education institutions cooperate with the government on the basis of formal agreements. Contracts between individual institutions and the state are renewed every 4 years.

LMD: bachelor's/master's degree structure

The new LMD structure consists of 3 *degrés* : the *Licence*, the *Master* degree and the *Doctorat*.

Licence

The *Licence* degree is awarded following upon completion of a university programme of 180 ECTS credits (3 years).

In terms of level, the *Licence* (NFQ level 2/EQF level 6) is comparable to an HBO or WO bachelor's degree, depending on the type of study. [Full description](#) of learning outcomes relevant to this level: p. 5.

Master

The duration of the master's programme is 2 years (120 ECTS). The programme consists of a foundation year (M1), after which students select one of 2 tracks: *Master de Recherche* (research master) or *Master Professionnel* ('regular' or professional master). Both tracks lead to the same degree, i.e. *grade de master*.

In terms of level, the *Master de Recherche* (NFQ level 1/EQF level 7) is comparable to a WO master's degree. [Full description](#) of learning outcomes relevant to this level: p. 5.

In terms of level, the *Master Professionnel* (NFQ level 1/EQF level 7) is comparable to a WO master's degree and in some cases to an HBO master's degree, depending on the type of study. [Full description](#) of learning outcomes relevant to this level: p. 5.

Institutions outside the national university system can request for permission to award this *degré* or this degree. This is already the case with a large number of engineering programmes, generally offered at a *Grande Ecole*. Graduates with a

Titre d'Ingénieur diplômé (in itself a legally protected degree) are entitled to use the *grade de Master*.

Doctorat

Third cycle education is concluded by the *Doctorat* which leads to the degree of *Docteur*. The minimal duration is 3 years. The degree of *Docteur* is conferred after a public defense of the doctoral thesis and is comparable to the Dutch doctor (dr.) title. Admission is based on the *grade de master* obtained after either a *Master Professionnel* or a *Master de Recherche*.

■ Non-university education

Grandes Ecoles

In France there are approximately 220 *Ecoles de Commerce et de Gestion*, 224 *Ecoles d'Ingénieur* and approximately 20 *Ecoles d'Architecture*. About 230 of these institutions are a *Grande Ecole* and united in the *Conférence des Grandes Ecoles*. The term *Grande Ecole* is not protected, and there is no clear-cut definition for this type of education. These, mostly private, institutions differ from universities in the type of education and specialisations they offer, in terms of their legal status, funding, and the level of education provided. They were established in Napoleonic times in response to the need for well-educated professionals. *Grandes Ecoles* are often selective and prestigious institutions, which constitute the breeding ground for top management and professionals in industry, politics, and the military.

Grandes Ecoles differ in terms of quality. Around 30 of them are of very high reputation by tradition and have become household names in French society, such as higher technical institutions (among others *Ecole Polytechnique*, *Ecole Centrale*, *Ponts et Chaussés*), general management (*Ecole Nationale d'Administration* (ENA)), business administration (*Ecole des Hautes Etudes Commerciales* (HEC)), agricultural higher education (*Institut National Agronomique* (INA)) and other prestigious institutions (*SciencesPo*, *Ecole Normale Supérieure*).

The institutions provide education in specific certain areas only, such as engineering.

Most programmes last 3 years after a *classe préparatoire* with a duration of 2 years. Admission is based upon a selective entrance examination (*concours*) and a personal selection procedure. Admission based only upon the *Baccalauréat* and a selective entrance examination is also possible, in which case the programme will last 5 years. Students are awarded the national recognised degree *grade de master*. *Grandes Ecoles* can also award *Bachelor* degrees, *Master of Science/Master of Business Administration* and *Mastère Spécialisée*, which lasts respectively 3 to 4, 4 to 5 and 6 years after the *Baccalauréat*. These

diplomas can be national qualifications or certificates issued by the institutions. The latter are not national recognised degrees.

Although programmes at *Grandes Ecoles* are not research oriented by nature, research is nowadays included in the programme. Research, however, remains the prerogative of the universities, even though most research in France takes place at special (independent) research institutes.

In terms of level, the *Diplôme/grade de master* (obtained at a *Grande Ecole*) (NFQ level 1/EQF level 7) is comparable to an HBO or WO master's degree, depending on the specialisation and the curriculum.

[Full description](#) of learning outcomes relevant to this level: p. 5.

■ Higher professional education

France has various types of higher professional education, both long and short programmes.

Lycée Technologique: Sections de Techniciens Supérieurs (STS)

This type of short higher education is offered by *Lycées technologiques* in the *Sections de Techniciens Supérieurs* (STS).

STS programmes are 2-year specialist professional programmes most often following related vocational tracks taken in the *Baccalauréat*. The programmes are offered in about 140 specialisations.

Given the large number of pupils enrolling in these programmes it may be said that much if not most, professional education in France takes place in this sector. After 2 years, students obtain the *Brevet de Technicien Supérieur* (BTS) with 120 ECTS.

The BTS prepares students for the labour market, though about 53% of the graduates continue in higher education.

In France there are around 2400 institutions that offer these programmes. More information on the specialisations can be found on the *Onisep* website. See under [Useful links](#).

In terms of level, the *Brevet de Technicien Supérieur* (BTS) (NFQ level 3/EQF level 5) is comparable to 2 years of higher professional education (HBO).

[Full description](#) of learning outcomes relevant to this level: p. 5.

Most of the programmes mentioned above are full time day time courses, but an increasing number of institutions have incorporated various alternating work/study arrangements, 'life-long learning' courses and programmes in adult education.

Instituts Universitaires de Technologie (IUT)

Short programmes in higher professional education are also offered by *Instituts Universitaires de Technologie* (IUT). These independent institutions (which are usually associated with a university) provide programmes in higher education in 19 faculties with 42 specialisations. The programmes take 2 years to complete, and graduates receive the *Diplôme Universitaire de Technologie* (DUT). Although the programmes are meant to provide direct access to the labour market, many graduates continue to other forms of higher education, like the *Licence Professionnelle*.

The *Licence Professionnelle* was introduced in 1999 as an initiative of professional organisations to better prepare students for the labour market. An internship with a duration of 12 to 16 weeks is part of the study programme. Admission is based upon the *Baccalauréat* and a selection procedure.

Graduates are trained for positions in middle management. More information can be found on the website of *Réseau IUT*, see under [Useful links](#).

In terms of level, the *Diplôme Universitaire de Technologie* (DUT) (NFQ level 3/ EQF level 5) is comparable to 2 years of higher professional education (HBO). [Full description](#) of learning outcomes relevant to this level: p. 5.

In terms of level, the *Licence Professionnelle* (NFQ level 2/ EQF level 6) is comparable to an HBO bachelor's degree. [Full description](#) of learning outcomes relevant to this level: p. 5.

■ Assessment systems

The following classification system is used in secondary and higher education:

Numerical grade	Description	Meaning	Notes
20-16	<i>Très bien</i>	Very good	
15-14	<i>Bien</i>	Good	
13-12	<i>Assez bien</i>	Fairly good	
11-10	<i>Passable</i>	Satisfactory	
9-8	-	Nearly satisfactory	In some cases a supplementary exam may be taken
7-0	<i>Ajourné</i>	Unsatisfactory	

The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is also used in France. More information on ECTS is available in the [ECTS User's Guide](#) issued by the European Commission.

More information about the value of foreign grades can be found on our [website](#) (Dutch only).

■ Bologna Process

Following the Bologna Process, the new higher education legislation came into force in 2002 (the *Décret n°2002-482 du 8 avril 2002*), in which higher education was organized following the 3-tier LMD structure: *Licence, Master, Doctorat*. The system was introduced gradually (2002-2006) and applies to all national institutes of academic education. As of 2006, all universities have organized their programmes according to this system.

	GRADES	DIPLOMES D'ETABLISSEMENT
D 8 années 16 semestres	Doctorat	
6 années 12 semestres		Mastère spécialisé Master of Business Administration (MBA)
M 5 années 10 semestres 300 ECTS	Master recherche Master professionnel Master of Science Diplôme d'ingénieur	Masters in Engineering and Business of the <i>Grandes Ecoles</i>
4 années 8 semestres	Master M1	Master of Science - MSc (4 or 5 years) 4-years Master
L 3 années 6 semestres 180 ECTS	Licence	Bachelor

Source: [CampusFrance](#)

■ Qualification frameworks

The French National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) was launched in 2002 when the national committee on vocational qualifications (CNCP) was set up. It incorporates a 5-level structure, which dates back to 1969. The 5-level structure framework will most likely be transformed into a 8-level structure in the future. However, the 5-level structure framework has been referenced to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

More information:

- [Website](#) of the *Commission Nationale de la Certification Professionnelle*, the National Coordination Point for the framework of qualifications.
- [Report](#) on Referencing of the French NFQ to the EQF for Lifelong Learning.

■ Quality assurance and accreditation

The quality assurance system in France is based upon the principle of a regular national evaluation procedure of higher education institutions, education programmes and certification. The state takes the final decision regarding accreditation (*habilitation*). Accreditation is granted for a defined period of time with a maximum of 6 years. External assessments cover all of the institution's activities: administration, management, educational programmes, teaching methods, social activities, and research.

In 2007 the national accreditation organization *L'Agence d'évaluation de la recherche et de l'enseignement supérieur* (AERES) was established with the task of evaluating all higher education and research in France. The *Commission des Titres d'Ingénieur* (CTI) is responsible for schools of engineering, with assessments that take place every 6 years. There is a separate commission for business study programmes, the *Commission d'évaluation des formations et des diplômes de gestion*.

Innovations in the quality assurance system are related to reforms in higher education, such as the granting of a greater autonomy to state and other institutions (*Pécresse Law* or LRU – law on the Liberties and Responsibilities of the Universities – passed in 2007). Higher education programmes, for example, are no longer set in advance; rather, institutions draw up their own programmes, on the condition that they fit within the LMD structure. Quality assurance and evaluation is carried out through AERES afterwards. Accreditation is granted by the Ministry of Higher Education on the basis of reports of AERES.

When evaluating a diploma, check if the qualification (*grade*) is a *diplôme national*, a *diplôme visé* or has a visa of the *Commission des Titres d'ingénieurs*, the so-called *habilitation* CTI. This information usually can be found on the website of a higher education institution in a *fiche descriptive*.

In contrast, a *Diplôme d'établissement/Diplôme Universitaire* (DU) is a diploma issued by the institution and therefore not nationally recognised.

■ International treaties

France signed the Lisbon Convention in 1997 and ratified it in 1999. The treaty came into force on 1 December 1999, replacing the European Treaty on admission to university education (1953). There are no bilateral recognition agreements between the Netherlands and France.

■ Diploma Supplement

The Diploma Supplement was introduced along with the passing of the law in April 2002, and is available at all institutions for all students at their request.

More information on the Diploma Supplement is available on the [website](#) of the European Commission.

■ Composition of file

For secondary education, the *Baccalauréat* certificate is required, with transcript (*relevé des notes*).

For higher education, all higher education diplomas and transcripts of each academic year (including grade lists).

■ List of higher education institutions

- [List](#) of university institutions.
- [Website](#) with *Grandes Ecoles* that are members of the umbrella organization *Conférence des Grandes Ecoles*.
- [List](#) of IUT's.

■ Useful links

- [Website](#) of the French ENIC/NARIC.
- [Website](#) of the *Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale*.
- [List](#) of rectorats.
- [Website](#) of Onisep, with extensive information on professions and programmes, including specialisations in the STS.
- [Website](#) of *L'étudiant* with a lot of information about professions and study programmes.
- [Website](#) of the *Agence d'Évaluation de la Recherche et de l'Enseignement Supérieur* (AERES), the national accreditation organization.
- [Website](#) of the *Commission Nationale de la Certification Professionnelle*, the National Coordination Point for the framework of qualifications.
- [Report](#) on Referencing of the French NFQ to the EQF for Lifelong Learning.
- [Website](#) of CampusFrance, the organisation which promotes French higher education institutions and study programmes.
- [Website](#) of the *Réseau Instituts Universitaires de Technologie* (IUT).