

DOCTORAL STUDIES IN FRANCE

The structure of doctoral studies in France was thoroughly revised in 2006, with the creation of doctoral departments designed to align French practice with European norms and achieve wider recognition of degrees in both the academic and professional spheres while continuing to ensure the highest level of education. Studies within the new doctoral departments are now seen as providing “professional research experience.”

Anyone holding a European master or equivalent may apply for admission to a doctoral department in order to prepare and defend a doctoral thesis. The Doctoral studies normally require three years. Successful candidates are awarded a doctoral degree, the highest degree offered in France’s higher education system.

FRANCE’S DOCTORAL DEPARTMENTS

Each PhD student joins a research team or unit affiliated to a specific doctoral department. Candidates are guided and supervised by a thesis supervisor.

The doctoral departments at each higher education institution represent multiple **research teams** from one or more institutions. Each department is organized around a specific theme.

The departments are responsible not only for **training** doctoral students but also for preparing them for **research careers** by offering them a scholarly setting in which to work and learn. Through instruction, seminars, and internships, students are introduced to a range of career opportunities in various settings, including academia, government, and industry.

The departments fulfill an essential coordinating role, ensuring the scientific coherence of candidates’ research projects.

- Every department is affiliated with a university or other higher education host institution authorized to deliver doctoral degrees (called support or principal institution) in the field represented by the department. The department, while formally affiliated with a single institution, may coordinate the work of research teams at several “**co-authorized**” or “**associated**” institutions.

Co-authorized institutions grant doctoral degrees independently.

Associated institutions may grant doctoral degrees only in conjunction with the doctoral department’s host institution.

- Doctoral departments may, and often do, combine their efforts, often within a higher education research cluster or research network. These clusters are known as PRES, for *pôles de recherche et d’enseignement supérieur* (Higher Education and Research clusters). The research networks may exist at the national, binational, or international level. An example of the research networks that exist at the national level are the thematic advanced research networks, or RTRA (*réseaux thématiques de recherche avancée*).
- Doctoral departments are accredited by France’s Ministry of higher education following an assessment by the national agency for the evaluation of research and higher education (AERES).

FRANCE’S DOCTORAL DEPARTMENTS IN FIGURES

- 295 doctoral departments were operating as of September 1, 2007
- 74,500 PhD students were pursuing degrees in France in 2008 - a third of them international students
- 10,495 doctoral degrees were awarded in 2006
- 4,000 research grants awarded in 2008
- 1,200 grants in 2007 under the CIFRE program (industrial agreement of training through research), a doctoral program partially supported by industry

WHAT DO FRANCE’S DOCTORAL DEPARTMENTS OFFER TO ADVANCED STUDENTS?

- a **scientific and scholarly environment** anchored by recognized research centers and teams
- **studies** relevant to candidates’ research goals and career plans
- an **international dimension**
- opportunities to complete **internships** in professional settings
- **support** in identifying career opportunities

APPLYING FOR ADMISSION TO DOCTORAL STUDIES

Doctoral departments are the linchpin of doctoral studies in France. Students begin doctoral studies by applying for admission to a doctoral department.

How to apply

- Aspiring candidates must hold a degree equivalent to a European Master
- Applicants should contact a doctoral department to inquire about the procedure for submitting a **research or consulting department’s research proposals**.
- The doctoral department will refer the candidate to a **thesis supervisor and review with the candidate the options for financing the candidate’s doctoral studies**.
- Once the candidate is accepted by the doctoral department and thesis supervisor, he or she signs a **thesis contract**.

The thesis contract represents the agreement of the doctoral candidate, the department, and the research center, team, or laboratory that will host the candidate. The contract specifies the subject of the candidate’s research and the conditions under which the research will be carried out. The contract helps ensure quality by setting forth the rights and responsibilities of each party and by situating the dissertation in the larger context of the candidate’s personal and professional plans, with explicit reference to the candidate’s goals and the means of reaching them.

FINANCING DOCTORAL STUDIES

Note: Candidates may be required to present a clear plan for financing their doctoral study as a condition for admission to a doctoral program. France issues different visas depending on how students finance their study.

The financial arrangements must be sufficient to allow the candidate to devote himself or herself full time to research over a period of 3 years. The doctoral department is the candidate's principal point of contact in all matters related to the financing of doctoral study.

THE DOCTORAL CONTRACT

FRANCE'S NEW SYSTEM OF PUBLIC FINANCING FOR DOCTORAL STUDIES

In April 2009, a new system of doctoral contracts replaced block grants (allocations doctorales) as the chief means of delivering public financing for doctoral education.

The new contract system is open to all doctoral degree students. Available for a period of 3 years, the contracts carry medical insurance and other social benefits in addition to a stipend. The minimum gross monthly stipend is 1,985 euros.

Contracts are awarded and administered by doctoral departments at the nation's higher education and research institutions. Contract terms are uniform from one institution to another.

Doctoral contracts are true employment contracts to the extent that they are enforceable by law and carry all of the benefits attached to such contracts under French law.

The new system is intended to recognize and reinforce the role of doctoral education in providing professional training in research.

=> In addition to the research contract funded by the French Ministry of Higher Education and awarded by the doctoral departments, there exist several other financing schemes, among them bilateral funds and scholarships awarded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and research grants offered by individual research laboratories, France's regional governments, and industry (under the CIFRE program, for example), as well as funds provided by the candidate's home country or institution.

INDUSTRY-SPONSORED EDUCATION AND RESEARCH CONTRACTS (CIFRE, CONVENTIONS INDUSTRIELLES DE FORMATION PAR LA RECHERCHE)

CIFRE grants enable doctoral candidates to prepare their dissertation within an industrial enterprise, in cooperation with an external academic research team. The enterprise and the student enter into a three-year work contract, under which the enterprise pays the student a monthly stipend of approximately 1,900 euros. Students wishing to obtain a CIFRE grant must apply, with their doctoral department, to the national association for technical research (ANRT, *association nationale de la recherche technique*, <http://www.anrt.asso.fr>).

Visa and status of foreign recipients of CIFRE grants => Recipients of CIFRE grants must apply for a normal student visa. Once in France, they must then apply for temporary work authorization (APT, *autorisation provisoire de travail*), with no change in legal status.

USEFUL SITES

- Agence CampusFrance : online information and guidance for a study project in France <http://www.campusfrance.org>
 - Directory of doctoral programs: [campusfrance.org](http://www.campusfrance.org)> search for all courses in France >level D <http://www.campusfrance.org/ecoledoc/>
 - CampusBourse, directory of grants programs : [campusfrance.org](http://www.campusfrance.org)>search for all courses in France>grant search engine <http://www.campusfrance.org/fr/d-catalogue/campusbourse/cfbourse/index.html#>
- National association of doctors of science (ANDèS, *Association nationale des docteurs ès sciences*), which collects and continually updates information on financial aid for doctoral studies: <http://www.andes.asso.fr/>
- Hosting of doctoral candidates and research scholars
 - Association Bernard Gregory: <http://www.abg.asso.fr/>
 - Fondation Kastler: <http://www.fnak.fr/>
- Information on visas
 - Contact information for French consulates abroad: <http://www.mfe.org> > [annuaires](http://www.mfe.org)
- French national legislation related to research: <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/texteconsolide/PEEBD.htm> (n° 2006-450 of 18 April 2006)
- Ministry of Higher Education, and Research: <http://www.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr>
- Agency for the evaluation of research and higher education (AERES, *Agence d'évaluation de la recherche et de l'enseignement supérieur*) : <http://www.aeres-evaluation.fr>
- ANVAR, the French national agency for the promotion of innovation: <http://www.oseo.fr>
- Directory of higher education and research, compiled by CNRS, the French national center for scientific research: <http://www.urec.cnrs.fr/annuaire/>
- CNRS quarterly (in English): <http://www2.cnrs.fr/en/2.htm>
- EURAXES, devoted to the mobility of research scholars and scientists in Europe: http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index_en.cfm
- Web portal for European researchers in France: <http://www.eracareers.fr/>

USEFUL TERMS

- ED: École doctorale (doctoral department)
- UR: Unité de recherche (research unit, center, or team)
- EA: Équipe d'accueil (host team)
- UMR: Unité mixte de recherche (integrated research unit)
- ERT: Équipe de recherche technologique (technological research team)
- RTRA: Réseau thématique de recherche avancée (thematic advanced research network)
- PRES: Pôle de recherche et d'enseignement supérieur (research and higher education cluster)
- CIFRE: Conventions industrielles de formation par la recherche (industrial agreement of training through research)
- HDR: Habilitation à diriger des recherches (certified research director, a postdoctoral French national diploma)