

DEGREES

PhD STUDIES IN FRANCE

After completing a master's or equivalent degree, aspiring researchers join a graduate school (*école doctorale*) to pursue their PhD, where they will spend three years training in research through research alongside teams that will support them in their development. After successfully defending their thesis, they will receive their PhD diploma.

Graduate schools (*écoles doctorales*) are affiliated with higher education institutions (HEIs). These doctoral schools host research teams that supervise the work of doctoral candidates. All students with a master's degree (Bac+5) or equivalent can apply for a PhD programme.

Key figures

287 graduate schools
(2023)
covering 10 research areas

13,600 PhDs awarded
in 2021
38% are international PhD
candidates

Overview

PhD programmes, in addition to developing functional research skills, provide practical professional experience.

- > Research projects (in laboratories and research centres)
- > Production and defence of a thesis to earn the doctorate
- > PhD candidates must complete a minimum of 120 hours of additional recommended courses: methodology and mastery of French, business and innovation, area-specific courses, teaching and education, etc.

Graduate schools (*écoles doctorales*)

PhD candidates receive their postgraduate training at research units, which are affiliated with a graduate school (*école doctorale*). Each candidate is supervised by a thesis advisor. Graduate schools host a number of research units which are affiliated with one or many higher education institutions in a variety of areas.

They are responsible for providing high-level scientific training, guiding candidates and preparing them to have successful careers through training modules, seminars, internships, introduction to entrepreneurship and open science by partnering with the world of industry.

In addition to coordinating PhD programmes, graduate schools (*écoles doctorales*) ensure that candidates' research projects are properly implemented.

- > Graduate schools are often seen as a federation of research units. They approve research projects and sign off on candidate recruitment.
- > Each school is affiliated with a university or institution (known as the 'support' or 'main' institution) which is duly accredited to award doctorates. Other types of institutions can be co-accredited or associates. Co-accreditation authorises each institution to award doctorates on

their own. Associate institutions can only award doctorates in partnership with the support institution of the graduate school.

- > **Thesis advisors** are key stakeholders who are responsible for recruiting candidates and defining and monitoring the three-year PhD research project. Thesis advisors are co-signatories of the Thesis Charter¹ (*Charte de la thèse*) and must possess the HDR certification to supervise research (*Habilitation à Diriger des Recherches*).
- > Graduate schools (*écoles doctorales*) may decide to enter into partnerships and award doctorates to candidates who are registered in partner institutions. These partnerships may take the form of communities of universities and institutions (*Communauté d'Universités et d'Établissements, COMUE*) or public experimental institutions (*Établissements publics expérimentaux, EPE*).
- > In order to optimally supervise candidates, increase visibility of research opportunities and widely disseminate information, graduate schools within a single institution often form a **postgraduate college (*collège doctoral*)**, which champions the work and goals of the entire doctoral community.
- > Graduate schools are accredited by the French Ministry of Higher Education and

Research and are evaluated every five years by the High Council for Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (Hcéres).

PhD programmes are registered with the National Registry of Professional Certifications (RNCP), where candidates can access the list of skills they will acquire during their research. The RNCP is available at www.francecompetences.fr

Registering for a PhD

Graduate schools are the cornerstone of PhD studies. Interested candidates are to register with a graduate school (*école doctorale*).

To register for a PhD, you must:

- > Hold a master's degree (bac+5) or equivalent.
- > Apply for research opportunities offered by graduate schools, laboratories or research bodies, or identify a researcher who will become your future thesis advisor and present your research project to them.
- > Contact the graduate school to start the admission process.
- > Following approval from the graduate school (*école doctorale*) and the thesis advisor, PhD candidates will sign the Thesis Charter upon registration.

¹ The 'Thesis Charter' (*Charte de la thèse*) is a moral and ethical contract between the PhD candidate, their thesis advisor, the director of the graduate school (*école doctorale*) and the home laboratory. It serves to ensure quality by defining the rights and obligations of all parties.

FUNDING YOUR PHD

Note: funding your PhD studies is often a condition to be accepted into a graduate school and register for your programme.

Funding should cover the three years of the programme so that candidates can dedicate their time and efforts to their research and enjoy the benefits of their PhD contract.

There are many sources of postgraduate funding available: funding from the graduate school (*école doctorale*) - funding as part of contracts with research bodies (CNRS, CNES, CEA, etc.) - research contracts (through European programmes or the French National Research Agency, ANR) - CIFRE work contracts - foreign government mobility programmes - bilateral programmes and grants from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs - international joint PhD programmes - funding from French regional authorities, etc.

The annual tuition fees are set by the government and are €380 in 2023.

Other sources of funding exist for PhD programmes such as regional authorities, foundations and associations.

Grant search engine:

<https://campusbourses.campusfrance.org>
Level > PhD > Post-doctoral

PhD CONTRACTS

PhD student employability and recruitment

A public sector PhD employment contract is a type of contract open to all PhD candidates. It is valid for three years with a minimum guaranteed monthly remuneration of €2,300 (before taxes). These contracts are drafted by graduate schools and are identical at all higher education institutions. They provide students with all the social benefits of a traditional public sector employment contract, while satisfying their programmes' requirement to develop their professional research skills.

A private sector PhD employment contract is a type of contract open to employees whose employer's main activity is research (i.e., greater than or equal to 5/6th of the total annual duration) and is related to the candidates' thesis. A partnership agreement is signed between the employer, the employee candidate and the accredited institution of the graduate school (*école doctorale*). The agreement sets out the material conditions of the research project and the amount of time to be spent at the employee's place of work.

A defined fixed-term contract (CDD) is to be signed between the employer and the employee no later than three years after the end of the PhD programme. This contract will give employees additional work experience to ease their transition to permanent public or private sector research positions.

CIFRE WORK CONTRACTS

CIFRE work contracts (industrial agreements for research-based training) allow PhD candidates to prepare their **thesis in a business environment** in collaboration with a graduate school-affiliated research team. A three-year **work contract** is to be signed between the business and the PhD candidate. The business will pay the PhD candidate a salary of €1,950 (gross) per month. Starting in January 2023, the new monthly amount will be at least €2,044. The gross salary paid to PhD candidates will gradually increase each year until 2026. The aim is for the salary to have increased by 12.5% by 2026, to a monthly amount of €2,300. The CIFRE work contract ensures that candidates can prepare their thesis in optimal conditions. Interested candidates are to contact their graduate school (*école doctorale*) and the French National Association for Research and Technology (ANRT).

www.anrt.asso.fr > Former > CIFRE

French Ministry of Higher Education and Research:

www.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/fr/les-cifre-46510

> 1,500 new annual CIFRE work contracts have been signed since 2020.

> The CIFRE contracts represented 10.5% of the funded PhD programmes for 2020-2021.

Visas

The type of visa required will depend on the candidate's situation:

> Long-stay (VLS) 'Passeport talent – researcher' visa

This visa is for holders of a master's degree who have signed an agreement with an institution.

> Long-stay visa (VLS-TS) - multiyear residence permit (CSP)

This visa is for non-salaried PhD candidates who possess the required level of financial resources to study in France. The multiyear residence permit will be granted at the end of the first year of study and will be valid for a period of two to four years, based on the type of studies.

Practical information

> **Campus France provides all the information you need** to pursue your PhD in France: directory of graduate schools, online thesis opportunities, overviews of mobility programmes and more. For more information, visit www.campusfrance.org/en/researcher

> **The doctorate, step by step:** www.campusfrance.org/en
> Research centre > Practical information for students and researchers > Guides

Glossary

ANRT: French National Association for Research and Technology (*Association Nationale Recherche Technologie*)

ED: Graduate school, postgraduate level (*École Doctorale*)

EMR (formerly ERL): Joint research team (*Équipe Mixte de Recherche*)

EUR: *Écoles Universitaires de Recherche*

GDR: Research group (*Groupement de Recherche*)

HDR: Certification to supervise research (*Habilitation à Diriger des Recherches*)

IRL (formerly UMI): International Research Laboratory

UMIFRE: Joint research unit of the French Research Institutes Abroad (*Unités Mixtes des Instituts Français de Recherche à l'Étranger*)

UMR: Joint research unit (*Unité Mixte de Recherche*)

UR: Research unit (*Unité de Recherche*)

Liens utiles

• French National Research Agency (ANR): <https://anr.fr/en/>

• Graduate schools directory (*Annuaire des écoles doctorales*): www.campusfrance.org/en > Researchers > Doctorate > Doctoral schools directory

• Association Bernard Gregory (ABG): <https://www.abg.asso.fr/en/>

• French National Association for Research and Technology (ANRT): www.anrt.asso.fr

• Campus Bourses grant search engine: <https://campusbourses.campusfrance.org>

• French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS): www.cnrs.fr/en

• CIFRE: www.anrt.asso.fr > Former > Cifre

• Confederation of Young Researchers (CJC) 17 associations of PhD candidates: <http://cjc.jeunes-chercheurs.org>

• DocPro, career placement for PhDs: www.mydocpro.org/en/node

• EURAXESS, researcher mobility in Europe: www.euraxess.fr

• Alfred Kastler National Foundation (acc&ss FnAK): www.fnak.fr/en/

• France-Visas : <https://france-visas.gouv.fr/en/>

• PhD in France portal, directory of graduate schools and thesis opportunities: <https://doctorat.campusfrance.org/en/phd/dschools>