

# *Investing in the future: rebuilding a public higher education service*

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Although France has achieved and even exceeded its target of 80% of each generation obtaining a baccalaureate, leading to the massification of higher education, it has failed to match this ambition with the necessary resources. The EESC believes that there is an urgent need to rebuild the public higher education system in order to prepare and anticipate a future for our young people and our society.

## *A proven crisis in higher education*

French higher education is undergoing **a major crisis: lack of funding, overall deficit in its universities, emergence of new inequalities and commodification of training in the lucrative private sector**. This lack of resources, which is responsible for the deterioration in the implementation of public service missions, has direct and visible consequences: lasting fragility of institutions, closure of courses, elimination of undergraduate and master's degree places, decline in the teaching-to-student ratio, increase in inequalities, etc. This situation explains the difficulties institutions face in carrying out their many missions (education, research, professional integration, regional anchoring and development, and ecological transition).

## *Rebuilding a public higher education system*

The EESC calls for greater investment in higher education. Higher education plays a key role in preparing tomorrow's society by educating citizens, promoting equality, strengthening democracy and social cohesion, and supporting the green transition. It calls for greater support for the necessary changes facing higher education, whether in terms of clarifying its missions or its organisation. It also recommends improving the conditions for studying, success and working for students and staff, providing better supervision of the private sector and strengthening links with local areas. To contribute to the government's current thinking on these issues, the EESC has drawn up 18 concrete and operational recommendations to make higher education a national priority.

3 million  
students

73.4% of whom  
are enrolled in public  
institutions.

26.6% are enrolled  
in private institutions

source : <https://www.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/nisies-2024-09-35566.pdf>

Two-  
thirds

of universities will be  
in deficit by 2024

Source : France Universités  
- january 2025

- 8 %  
expenditure  
per student

Source : Élise Huillery,  
French economist,  
professor of economics  
at Paris-Dauphine  
University, interviewed  
on 18 February 2025  
by EESC

## Investing in the future: rebuilding a public higher education service

### 1 PROVIDING THE PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION SERVICE WITH THE MEANS TO PREPARE FOR THE FUTURE AND FULFIL ITS PUBLIC INTEREST MISSIONS

→ How? By increasing funding for higher education to 2% of GDP per year (excluding the research budget), providing it with €10 billion (i.e. €1 billion per year over 10 years). By developing a national framework for 5-year contracts between the State and public higher education institutions.

### 2 MOVING AWAY FROM A MARKET-BASED APPROACH: STRENGTHENING PUBLIC SERVICES, REGULATING COMPETITION AND PROMOTING COOPERATION

→ How? By monitoring, penalising and delisting courses listed on Parcoursup that do not lead to a state-recognised qualification, those that contravene expected academic or educational standards, or those offered as apprenticeships that do not lead to professional qualifications listed in the National Register of Professional Certifications (RNCP).

→ By submitting any plans to establish a private, for-profit institution in a given area to the local education authority for prior approval, in order to ensure genuine transparency between the various training programmes on offer.

### 3 STRENGTHENING THE CAPACITY FOR ACTION OF INSTITUTIONS AND STAFF

→ How? By launching a multi-year investment plan in human resources (recruitment, training, consolidation of status, etc.) for higher education staff. By aligning the average expenditure per student in the least well-funded universities and vocational courses with that of preparatory classes for the grandes écoles (CPGE) and higher technician sections (STS). By developing greater visibility of what universities have to offer on the continuing education market.

### 4 FURTHER ANCHORING HIGHER EDUCATION IN LOCAL AREAS AND MAKING IT A LEVER FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL COHESION

→ How? By launching a €15 billion plan to adapt and renovate university buildings over a period of 20 years. By incorporating public higher education services into sustainable regional development policies (local universities on a human scale, university branches with their own resources) and by strengthening student mobility policies. By engaging with student representative organisations in a comprehensive reform of the social criteria-based scholarship system to ensure that students have a genuine right to decent living and studying conditions (with particular attention to overseas territories).

#### THE RAPPOREUR

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