

REFORM IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN FRANCE

The higher education reform to make the French higher education architecture more convergent to the European university systems is being progressively implemented on the basis of a new legal framework defined by a set of decrees published last April and concerning the whole French higher education system. These provisions have been recently completed and precised by an official note (or « circulaire ») which the Minister of Youth, National Education and Research sent last November to the Presidents of Universities about the way the new structure of degrees called « LMD » (standing for « Licence/Master/Doctorat ») is about to be made real in the facts.

- The major features of the reform can be summarized by :

- ✓ the creation of a new degree : the Master degree which can be either professionally-oriented (with a « Master Professionnel ») or research-oriented (=> with a « Master Recherche ») ;
- ✓ the organization of all the higher education studies into semesters and course units;
- ✓ the general implementation of ECTS in the design and the « quantitative » meaning of new degrees : according to the basic principle adopted at the European level, a « Licence » (the French version of a Bachelor degree) means 180 credits and a Master equals to 300 credits (or 120 more than the « Licence ») ;
- ✓ the delivery of the Diploma Supplement, if international mobility is at stake ;
- ✓ and the general principle of a regular national assessment of the higher education institutions (HEI) and their educational offer as a prerequisite before «habilitations» (« accreditations ») can be given by the State for a limited period of time : accreditation for all kinds of degrees will indeed be given to French universities and other public higher education institutions on the basis of a regular national evaluation, linked to the policy of contractualization developed by the State with these HEI ;
- ✓ and the broadened principle of validation of previous studies and personal experiences of the students.

- Consequences :

1/ The new Master pattern and its consequences :

- ⇒ So, the creation of the Master degree makes the French higher education system close to the European architecture based on the Bachelor degree (licence), the Master degree (master) and the Doctorate (doctorat).
- ⇒ Previously delivered degrees after 5 years of studies such as DEA, DESS and « homemade » MA delivered by the « Grandes Ecoles » will be redefined into the new MA model.

2/ The notion of « flexible learning paths » :

- ⇒ With the ECTS, the notion of « learning path» is put forward => French universities will be able to create new kinds of disciplines without actually asking for the official creation of a « brand-new » discipline to the Ministry and thanks to new « licence » or « master »'s degrees based on different sorts of major components, and therefore based on new or unusual combinations such as biology and computer science, or law and languages, or whatever Those flexible learning paths will allow to meet the needs of getting familiar with transdisciplinary approaches and transversal competencies, of personal profiles and of the ever-changing needs of the jobmarket.

- Calendar :

- ⇒ It's now up to the universities and higher education institutions, especially the ones involved in the policy of contractualization developed by the ministry of Education, to redefine and reorganize their educational offer in relation to the new Master and Bachelor's framework ; propositions presented by these institutions will be examined and new « accreditations » (or « habilitations ») will be given on the basis of the assessment criteria defined by the ministerial note mentioned above.

Linked to the different « waves » of contractualization already defined in France according to geographical areas, the reform should be made real everywhere round the country by the academic year of 2005/2006.