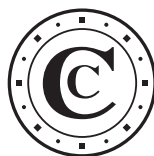


Cour des comptes



PUBLIC ENTITIES AND POLICIES

UNIVERSITIES BY 2030: MORE FREEDOMS, MORE RESPONSIBILITIES

STRUCTURAL ISSUES FOR
FRANCE

OCTOBER 2021

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FOREWORD

This report is part of a body of work intended to present, for several major public policies, the main challenges that public decision-makers will face in the coming years and the levers that could make it possible to meet them. This series of publications, which runs from October to December 2021, follows on from the report submitted in June 2021 to the President of the Republic, *A public finance strategy to exit the crisis*. This summary work aims to develop, for several essential structural issues, diagnostic elements resulting from previous work of the Court and courses of action capable of consolidating long-term growth while reinforcing the fairness, effectiveness and efficiency of public policies.

In accordance with its constitutional mission of informing citizens, the Court wished to develop a new approach, which differs from its usual work, and thus make, through this series of deliberately very concise and targeted reports, its contribution to the public debate, while taking care to leave open the various possible avenues of reform.

This report was deliberated by the 3rd chamber and approved by the Court of Accounts' Publication and Planning Committee.

The publications of the Court of Accounts are accessible online on the website of the Court and the regional and territorial chambers of accounts: www.ccomptes.fr.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

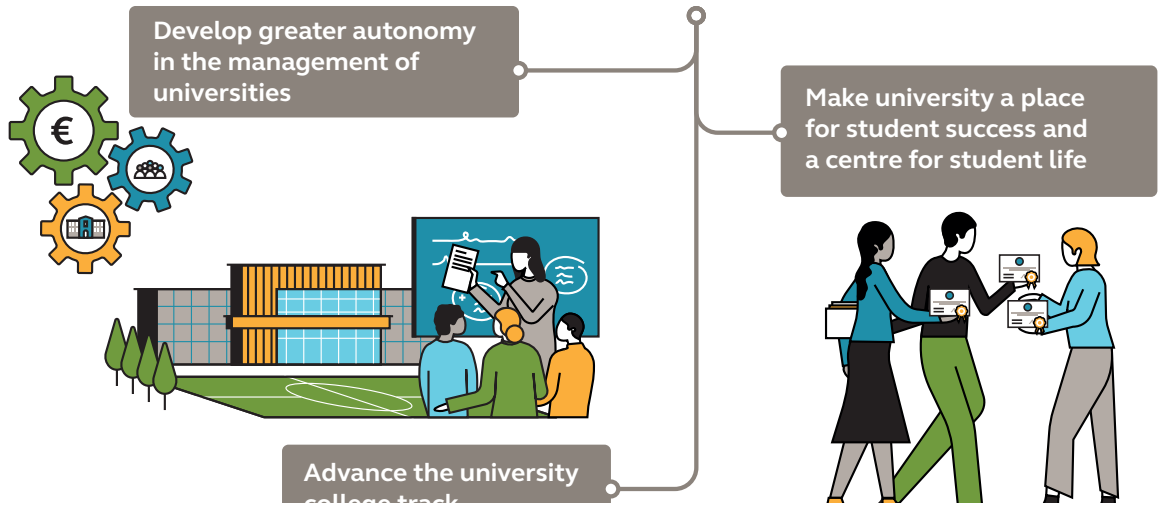
The university landscape has been profoundly reorganised over the past fifteen years by a continuous series of reforms. Despite the progress brought about by the 2007 Law on university freedoms and responsibilities (LRU), universities' autonomy is still restricted due to ill-defined responsibilities and actions that are sometimes partially accomplished. However, there are many challenges: responding to the continual increase in the student demographic while improving the conditions for supporting student life; going beyond the stage of an illusory autonomy, whether in the fields of human resources management, assets, internal organisation, or even the good administration of research within universities; facing in an intelligible manner the problems of differentiation between establishments, and finally, meeting the financial challenge with regard to both public financing and own resources.

In view of this observation, the various work produced by the Court makes it possible to distinguish three levers of action that can be mobilised over the next ten years. The first concerns increasing autonomy, which involves reforming the mechanism for allocating resources, through granting new freedoms to implement a genuine recruitment and human resources management strategy, full-status recognition of a research operator, and the general decentralisation of assets. The second line of thought leads us to think of the university as a genuine place for success and centre of student life, and to make it the sole point of contact for students. The third avenue for the future would be to accept and manage the differences between universities, which would open up the prospect of creating university colleges.

Key figures

- Of **2.7 million** students, **1.6 million** are enrolled in university, a **10%** increase over five years
- There are **73** universities, ranging from **2,000** to **80,000** students
- Only **45%** of undergraduate students graduate in **3, 4 or 5 years**
- The average cost of the student amounts to **€11,000**

GIVE MORE FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITIES TO UNIVERSITIES BY 2030



INTRODUCTION

Universities' autonomy was instituted as a principle and ambition by the Law on university freedoms and responsibilities (LRU) of August 2007. Since then, the public authorities, all administrations included, have continued to encourage this objective.

Universities have for the most part seized the new responsibilities which were granted to them by law, but their room for progress is now limited. The French university model, which still hesitates between centralisation and autonomy, is not completed. According to comparisons made in 2017 by the European University Association (EUA) covering 29 European countries or regions, France is ranked 20th in terms of organisational autonomy, 24th in terms of financial autonomy and 27th in terms of human resources autonomy. By broadening the comparisons to the OECD, the amount of expenditure devoted by France to its higher education in 2018 corresponds to the average of member countries, i.e. 1.45% of gross domestic product (GDP). However, this ratio places it far behind the United States, the United Kingdom and Norway, which exceed or are close to 2%. The 2017 White Paper on higher education and research sets the target for funding higher education to 2% of GDP, which would assume an increase in government spending of €10 billion over ten years. Whereas this condition is not fulfilled, the number of students continues to increase. 1.7 million students have enrolled in university at the start of the 2021 academic year, a figure up 10% in five years.

In this context of financial strain on the university system already mentioned by the Court in June 2021 in its report *A public finance strategy to exit the crisis*, the challenges to be met are immense. Admittedly, since 2007, the university community has invested heavily in gradually taking over a large part of the new responsibilities which are now incumbent on it. It is also significant that the accounts and management of universities have, overall, improved in recent years, which is to the credit of their management teams. Certain areas of education and research position the French university in the leading group of international rankings. The governance, lecturers and administrative staff have often shown, during the health crisis, a significant capacity for mobilisation. This involvement and responsiveness to changes deserve to be highlighted.

Nonetheless, the reform of our university system has remained stuck in midstream, as shown in the first part of this report which takes a retrospective look at the last fifteen years. This assessment highlights the persistence of obstructive elements,

which prevent consideration of "Act II of autonomy" called for by the Conference of University Presidents. The second part of the report considers levers of action likely to remove the obstacles that keep universities stranded in midstream and prevent them from becoming part of a trend in a landscape that is finally stable and has been reorganised.

1 - A REFORM STUCK IN MIDSTREAM

The history of the French university is marked by stages that have shaped its identity over the centuries, but the pace of change has

accelerated considerably over the past two decades.

The continuous reorganisation of the landscape

After the initial structuring of universities resulting from the Napoleonic reforms, the Third Republic permanently froze the institutional landscape around the duality between *grandes écoles* and universities, the first being selective and accessible through preparatory classes, the second geared towards those with a baccalaureate, and located in sixteen large cities (a geography partly recognisable today on the map of the most impressive universities by size and the establishment of initiatives of excellence). In the last third of the 20th century, major reforms - such as the 1968 Faure law and 1984 Savary law - sought to respond to the explosion in the student demographic and new social aspirations by universities acquiring legal personality, by extending the duration of higher education studies, creating short professional training courses (higher education vocational sections [STS- *sections of higher technicians*] and University institutes of technology - IUT), and finally by significantly restructuring universities (splitting up the universities in Paris and major cities, creating universities in new and medium-sized towns). This led to separating the higher education map from that of research, this phenomenon having in part been corrected from the 1970s through creating joint research units (UMR), initially shared with the National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS [*Centre national de la recherche scientifique*]), and then with all research organisations. These steps in the universities' history have been taken over a long period.

Since the 2000s, the reforms implemented have been a succession of reviews and innovations carried out at a frantic pace of one every two years on average. The scope, number and overlapping of laws and regulations have upset the landscape of higher education and research which is still not stabilised, in particular with regard to universities: the establishment of the LMD (Bachelor's degree-Master-Doctorate) in anticipation of European harmonisation in

2002, creation of the National Research Agency (ANR) in 2005 and, with it, development of funding through calls for projects, and the 2006 Research Programme Law creating in particular the PRES (research and higher education centres [*Pôles de recherche et d'enseignement supérieur*]) and the Research and Higher Education Evaluation Agency (AERES [*Agence d'évaluation de la recherche et de l'enseignement supérieur*]), the 2007 Law on University Freedoms and Responsibilities

(LRU), Campus Plan in 2008, creation of the post-baccalaureate admission procedure (APB) in 2009, the future investment programmes (PIA) from 2010 spearheading the initiatives of excellence (IDEX), the 2013 Law on Higher Education and Research, which in particular creates new university groups and replaces AERES with the High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (HCERES), the 2018 Law on the Guidance and Success of Students (ORE), which replaces APB with Parcoursup, the Order of December 2018 authorising experimental establishments, reform of the first year common to health studies (PACES) in 2019 and finally the 2020 Research Programming Law (LPR). All these reforms and implementing texts have given rise to improvements, an abundance of projects but also confusion.

The institutional landscape has become blurred. Attempts at groupings, mergers, associations and site policies have followed one another in search of coherence quickly shaken up by changes in prerogatives or the creation of institutional frameworks that immediately expired. Thus, the 26 PRES gave way to 19 university and establishment communities (COMUE) created by law in 2013 whose disappointing results led not only to their virtual disappearance (the Inter-ministerial Committee for Public Transformation of 15 November 2019 even decided to abolish them) but also to the emergence of new grouping methods proposed by the Order in 2018.

Many entities disappear, some universities have merged. This process leads to the birth of larger and fewer new establishments but without necessarily the management resources suited to their sudden growth.

What can citizens and students understand from these thwarted series of reforms and these infinitely variable groupings? A student may have started their studies in 2013 and completed them in 2021 by obtaining a doctorate from a university that has changed its status, positioning of its disciplinary fields, name, or even disappeared in favour of another.

A - The challenge of the growing number of students

The continuous increase in the student demographic is a critical issue. At the start of the 2019 academic year, French higher education and research had 2.72 million students (including 1.67 million enrolled at university), i.e. an increase of around 243,700 students over the last five years (+ 9.6%). This increase represents in volume the equivalent of ten medium-sized universities. Universities, which accommodate 56% of the student population and absorb 44% of new baccalaureate holders (225,000 students), are directly affected by these strong upward trends which will continue, according to available estimates, until 2029. For 2020 alone, universities (IUT [university institutes of technology] not included) had to integrate

32,000 additional students with almost the same resources. The student-teacher ratio therefore continues to deteriorate. Despite the implementation of *Parcoursup*, universities still fail to manage their inflow of students. The bachelor's degree is in fact open to all without a selection procedure at the start of the courses and with the application of guidance criteria

that are not very transparent.

Faced with this demographic growth, access to higher education remains largely dependent on students' social background.

Table 1: access to and success in higher education

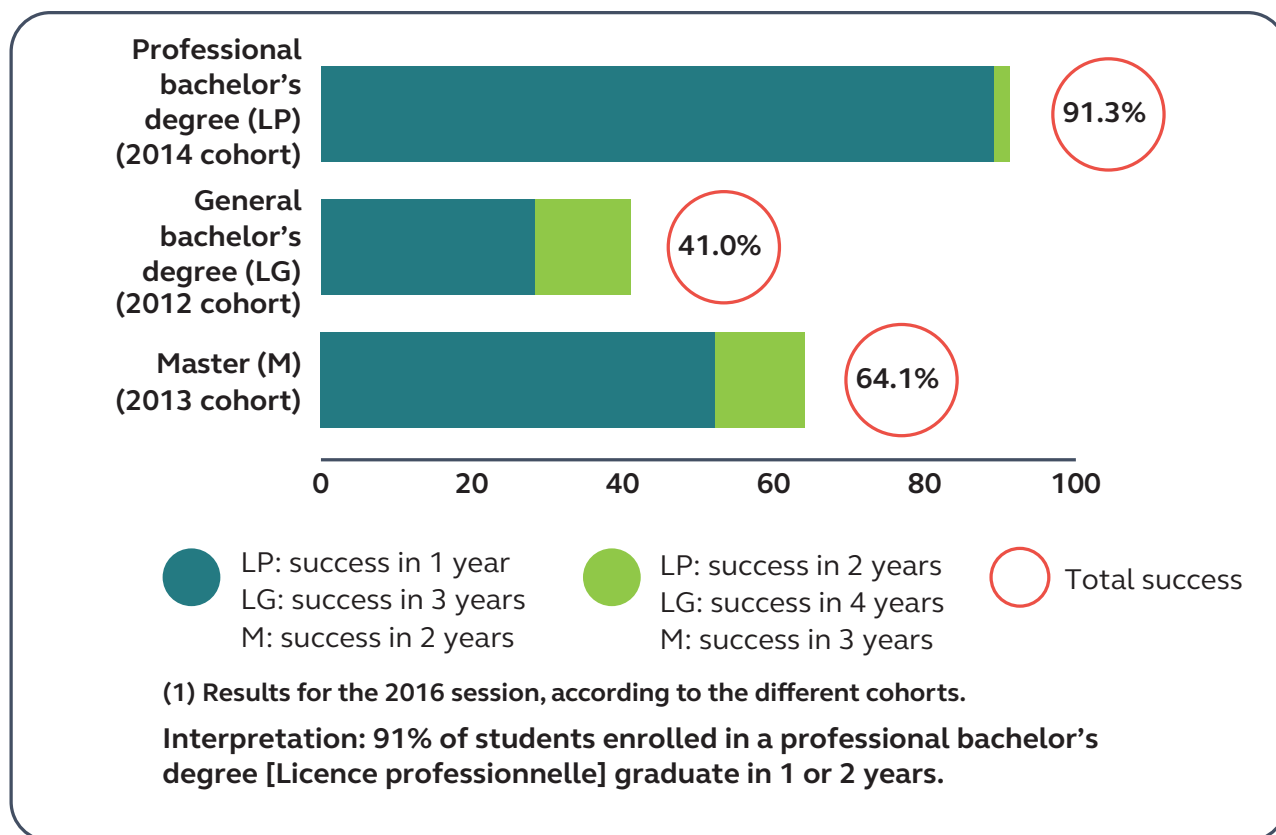
General data on access to and success in higher education	
Percentage of children of executives or of those in intermediate occupations, studying or having studied in higher education	76%
Percentage of children of workers or employees, studying or having studied in higher education	48%
Percentage of undergraduate students graduating in 3, 4 or 5 years	45%

Source: Court of Accounts, according to data from SIES

Despite the existence of multiple social openness mechanisms (e.g. "*cordées de la réussite*", the "best baccalaureate holder" system abolished by the 2020 Research Programming Law, the creation of the new scholarship levels 0bis and 7 in 2013, etc.), applied without always taking stock, significant disparities in terms of success between general, technological and vocational baccalaureate holders remain. The success of general baccalaureate holders is thus higher (56.5%) than that of technological baccalaureate holders (19.8%) or that of

vocational baccalaureate holders (7.7%). We can only wonder about the performance of undergraduate training despite the improvements hoped for in this regard after the implementation of the ORE law, the *Parcoursup* platform in 2018, the reform of the PACES in 2019 and the creation of the University Bachelor of Technology in 2021. For families from informed backgrounds and high social and cultural classes, the preparatory class [*classe préparatoire*] remains more attractive than university in most disciplines.

Graph 1: access to and success in higher education



Source: SIES, *Enseignement supérieur, Recherche et Innovation en chiffres* [Higher education, Research and Innovation in figures] 2018, p.12

These initial inequalities are heightened by the poor conditions in which universities manage student life. Unlike many countries, particularly in Europe, social support, accommodation, catering and the organisation of student life are mainly managed by external actors such as the CNOUS [national body in charge of coordinating student services] and 27 CROUS [regional centres providing student services]. The current organisation is complex, increasing the number of offices and stakeholders which students must contact. In 2015, the Court highlighted certain shortcomings of the CROUS: very inadequate monitoring of attendance for scholarships, despite the budgetary priority from which they benefit, shortcomings in the supply of student accommodation, or even an insufficient

university catering service. The distribution of assistance and support does not allow for the establishment of a coherent, responsive and campus-focused social policy. The quality of the welcome for students, confronted with a system that is not transparent, is felt in particular by foreign students. These shortcomings do not allow students to fully recognise "their" university as a community which simultaneously welcomes, trains and supports them during their studies, which explains the poor sense of belonging. The evident weakness of the networks of students and former students is proof of this. In France, university is not perceived as an "Alma Mater", according to the formula used in Switzerland, Belgium or Canada. Despite the efforts of officials and lecturers to pay attention to

students, especially during the health crisis, students' relationship with their university is purely practical: training and graduating. Very few universities have succeeded in developing with their students a lasting sense of belonging or sense of being part of a project.

B - An illusory autonomy

In the absence of a legal or regulatory definition, the principle of university autonomy can be understood as the authority granted to each of them to set its own rules within academic, financial, organisational and human resources fields.

The 2007 LRU law and the gradual transition of broader responsibilities and powers to universities were a major step, which has resulted in a more presidential type system of university governance, the integration of the wage bill into their budget, globalisation of the subsidy for public services allocated by the State, better management of the employment map and finally, the development of tools intended to increase the institutions' own resources (university foundations, subsidiaries for promoting research, etc.).

In terms of recruitment and human resources, an area that has remained a blind spot since 2007, the 2020 Research Programming Law made it possible to take a step forward by introducing, with a cap of 25% on annual recruitments, a new mechanism for local hiring by contract. This dispensation from competitive recruitment inspired by the American *tenure tracks* (junior professorships) abolishes the obligation of qualification by the CNU (*Conseil national des universités* [National Council of Universities]) for the recruitment of university professors and creates employment contracts more suited to the timing of

research projects (employment contract for a mission of an indefinite duration). At the same time, universities have benefited from a relaxation in national accreditation procedures allowing them to design differentiated training strategies.

Despite these advances, there is little leeway for universities. A university which does not control either its recruitment or the management of staff promotions and career development cannot be described as "autonomous". Maintaining national recruitment procedures for research-professors (qualification by the CNU) hampers training and research policies, by limiting the pool of potential candidates and restricting the possibilities for internal professional development. The management of administrative staff's careers by local education authorities and the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation further deprives heads of institutions of essential management levers. Finally, the staff of research organisations present on university sites (researchers, engineers, technicians or other administrative staff) are not considered for management or, at the very least, joint management by universities, due to a lack of close coordination with research organisations managing these human resources.

The devolution to universities of their building infrastructure, which would be a strong symbol and realisation of their inclusion in their area, remains at an impasse. The LRU and various plans (university plan 2000, campus plan) have initiated a process that should lead to the devolution of real estate assets to universities. Few of them have so far opted for this path. University buildings represent nearly 18 million built square meters, making universities one of the main beneficiaries of

the State's public domain. With the massive investment of the 1990s and 2000s and the creation of new universities, many buildings with poor energy performance were built for training and laboratories. The renovation of these assets is a priority; their maintenance, on a daily basis and for major works, is a necessity. The Court has observed in most of its audits that many universities have no means of achieving this, sometimes for lack of expertise in the matter, often for lack of funding. As a result, too many buildings are unsuitable or dilapidated, without it being possible in the medium term to bring them up to the expected level of comfort and safety. Having failed to assess the scale of university buildings, central government, in spite of guidance texts, cannot hope for a successful outcome of transferring buildings to the universities which occupy them. Although devolution is considered by the inspectorates to lead to managerial progress, the number of universities with full ownership of their buildings remains limited.

University governance has made progress in recent years, but it is waiting for a second wind. While an elective system entrusts research professors with complex management responsibilities, they are in no way prepared for the responsibilities they exercise. Boards of Governors, in too many cases, leave little room for representation by members outside the university. The agendas, which legislation makes mandatory, also dissuade the latter from attending long and tedious sessions in which strategic debates are reduced to the bare minimum. The general managers of services (DGS [*directeurs généraux des services*]), essential links for informed governance, are still too often relegated to a subordinate role and their status remains uncertain. Recruitment for their administrative teams is rarely a priority.

The so-called autonomous universities clearly remain dependent on the Ministry.

Although the reforms of the last fifteen years all move towards greater managerial freedom, the framework remains highly centralised, characterised by financial and human resources determined by central government or even administrative and educational organisation rules that are equally applied to all universities, whatever their purpose, size and location. In reality, the full potential of the LRU law has not yet been fully exploited.

C - Increasing differentiation between universities

The essence of the LRU law was to bring about the emergence of around ten world-class universities. However, the purpose of the other universities was not clarified. Discrimination has taken place as a result of ultra-selective instruments entrusted to international panels whose composition has not much changed in ten years. The initiatives of excellence (IDEXs) or the calls for projects of the future investment programmes (PIAs) are the most visible markers of this evolution. This leads to a demarcation with an unclear outline between universities with new and vast resources and those which, lacking assertiveness or initial capacities, have not been able to overcome the difficulties of the competitive process for projects. The Europeanisation of higher education systems and increased international competition, particularly revealed by extensive media coverage of international university rankings from 2003 (Shanghai, THE, QS, etc.), only exacerbate these trends.

Sometimes spectacularly, sometimes quietly, differentiation took place which is not recognised by the education code. Within a context still marked by the divides

between *grandes écoles* and universities, on the one hand, and research organisations and establishments, on the other hand, the many successive and cumulative mechanisms have led universities to form two groups, one grouping together small and medium-sized universities, and the other grouping together those with an IDEX label. They thus tend to defend different, if not divergent, interests, outside the powers that normally fall to the Conference of University Presidents, even though some universities are struggling to belong to either group. The Order of December 2018 had the effect of further increasing the differentiation between institutions to the detriment of being able to understand the landscape on an international scale. Increasingly marked inequalities are widening between institutions. The top-ranked institutions tend to benefit from new resources while, perhaps already irreversibly, universities with the least selective funding are destined to remain so.

These differentiating factors, sometimes presented as a form of Darwinian natural selection, are mainly based, in particular from international rankings, on the criterion of research, ignoring the university's original mission of knowledge transfer. The training itself (from the quality of teaching to the conditions for delivering training) has rarely or not at all been included in the project selection criteria. As a result, education and student life are not indicators that are truly taken into account when distributing the massive resources allocated to calls for projects. The universities that welcome the largest number of undergraduate students are rarely the beneficiaries of these subsidies. Differentiating between institutions based on research is a powerful and unacceptable factor of inequality

between universities and, ultimately, of segregation between students. The emergence of world-class university champions should not result in a divided university system.

The exclusion of training from the selective differentiation criteria should not mask the difficulties encountered by university research. Becoming increasingly competitive, it is subject to organisational rules that do not promote its development. The joint research units (UMRs [*Unités mixte de recherche*]), by nature, largely elude universities. Research organisations have not experienced the organisational upheavals that have imposed themselves on universities; their presence within the joint research units is seen as a mark of quality. However, there is nothing favourable about the management of these laboratories which is fragmented and not transparent. Under these conditions, it will be difficult for universities to appear in international rankings relying on their own strengths and merits.

D - The financial challenge

The lock on financial resources, both public funding and universities' own resources, is the most difficult to unlock.

Public funding for universities is out of step with reality. National expenditure for higher education returned in 2018 to its 2007 level. Due to the increasing number of students, the average expenditure per student fell in 2019 to €11,530 in universities, compared with €14,270 in higher education vocational sections [*sections de techniciens supérieurs*] and €15,700 in preparatory classes for *grandes écoles*. This average expenditure tends to decline as shown in graph 2. Universities are dependent on a poorly assessed subsidy for

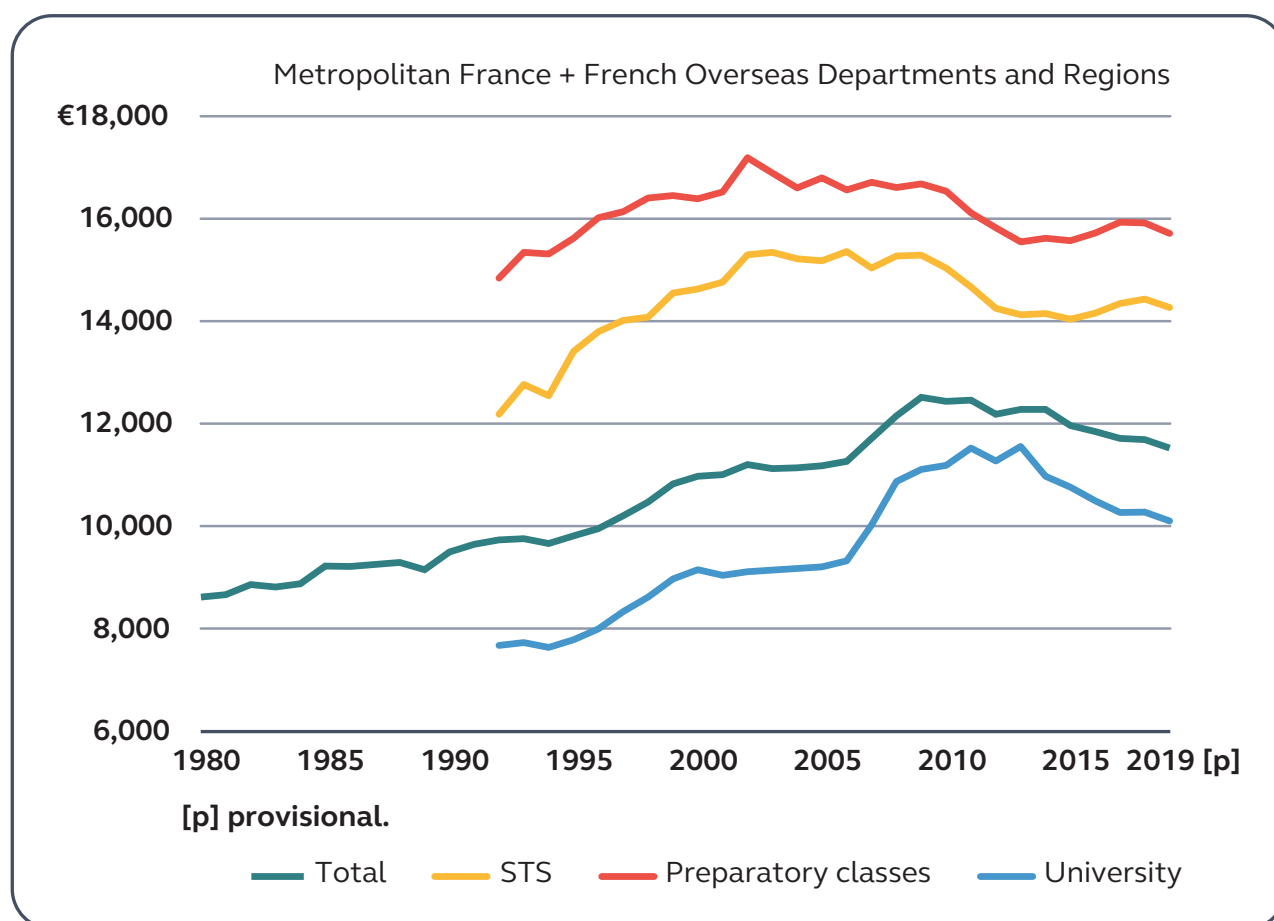
public service costs that represents between 78% and 82% of their resources (€10.5 billion). This government contribution is almost entirely devoted to the wage bill. As a result, universities have very little or sometimes even no leeway to meet their operating or investment needs, whether in terms of property, training or IT infrastructure expenditure.

As for the contribution to higher education and research by local authorities, in 2019 it amounted to €1.7 billion, including €800 million for education and student life and €910 million for research and innovation.

Although established at the macroeconomic level, the underfunding of French universities remains a poorly understood fact. It is impossible to determine the scale of this while the university system is unable to break down its costs. No stakeholder, ministry, local education authority or university has acquired the means to establish them. Few universities are able to present the cost of training reliably. As a result, the average cost of a student published by the Ministry (€11,530) appears to be quite theoretical. The differences in costs between training or courses, as currently estimated, i.e. without cost accounting and without taking student life into account, are therefore questionable. The allocation of resources by the Ministry and the contracts which bind it to each university are more like a lump sum calculation, the bases

of which do not fairly integrate the effect of demographic pressure, than meeting the actual needs of each university. The lack of exact knowledge about their costs, and therefore about their control, is an aberration. It leads universities to live in financial uncertainty with a total lack of transparency vis-à-vis public authorities, taxpayers, local administrators as well as lecturers and students.

Graph 2: change in expenditure per student



Source: MENJS-MESRI-DEPP, Compte de l'éducation

The mobilisation of universities' own resources, often cited in recent years as a solution to ease the financial pressure, must be encouraged but there are also limits.

In the field of training, enrolment fees are fixed. Their low cost is equivalent to almost free higher education for university students. At the start of the September 2021 academic year, the

fees amounted to €170 for a bachelor's degree, €243 for a master's and €380 for a doctorate. If we considered a substantial increase in the amount of these fees, the effect would be significant but far from being able to meet the challenges.

Should the enrolment fees be increased?

Regularly mentioned, the increase in enrolment fees raises many social problems and management difficulties; it must be linked to respect for the constitutional principle of free education. As the Court demonstrated in 2018, by applying a significant multiplier, e.g. by increasing them to €730 for a bachelor's degree, €887 for a master's and €1,380 for a doctorate, the overall revenue obtained would be around €1 billion.

The resources that universities derive from their own degrees, continuing education or apprenticeship are below potential. Apart from the fact that these resources are not all included in the general budget but are acquired through training, they are largely undersized. Universities have not taken up the challenge of continuing education, the financial potential of which is considerable. It remains underdeveloped, although it contributed €323 million to universities in 2017. The same is true of apprenticeships, which then represented tax revenue of €101 million for universities. These training courses require specific engineering and the establishment of internal infrastructure, including apprenticeship training centres (CFA) which are still too often outsourced. Finally, this issue is made worse by pricing that is very rarely based on cost accounting, without which, generating a profit margin that creates wealth and therefore autonomy is an illusion.

Own resources stemming from research are more significant, once they come from calls for projects from the National Research Agency (ANR) or future investment programmes

(PIA), or from European calls. These selective resources are unevenly distributed. They can be lasting, like the initiatives of excellence (IDEX), or limited in time, which poses a serious problem of survival for some laboratories. Not all of them return to the general budget and may remain flagged for research or an individual programme.

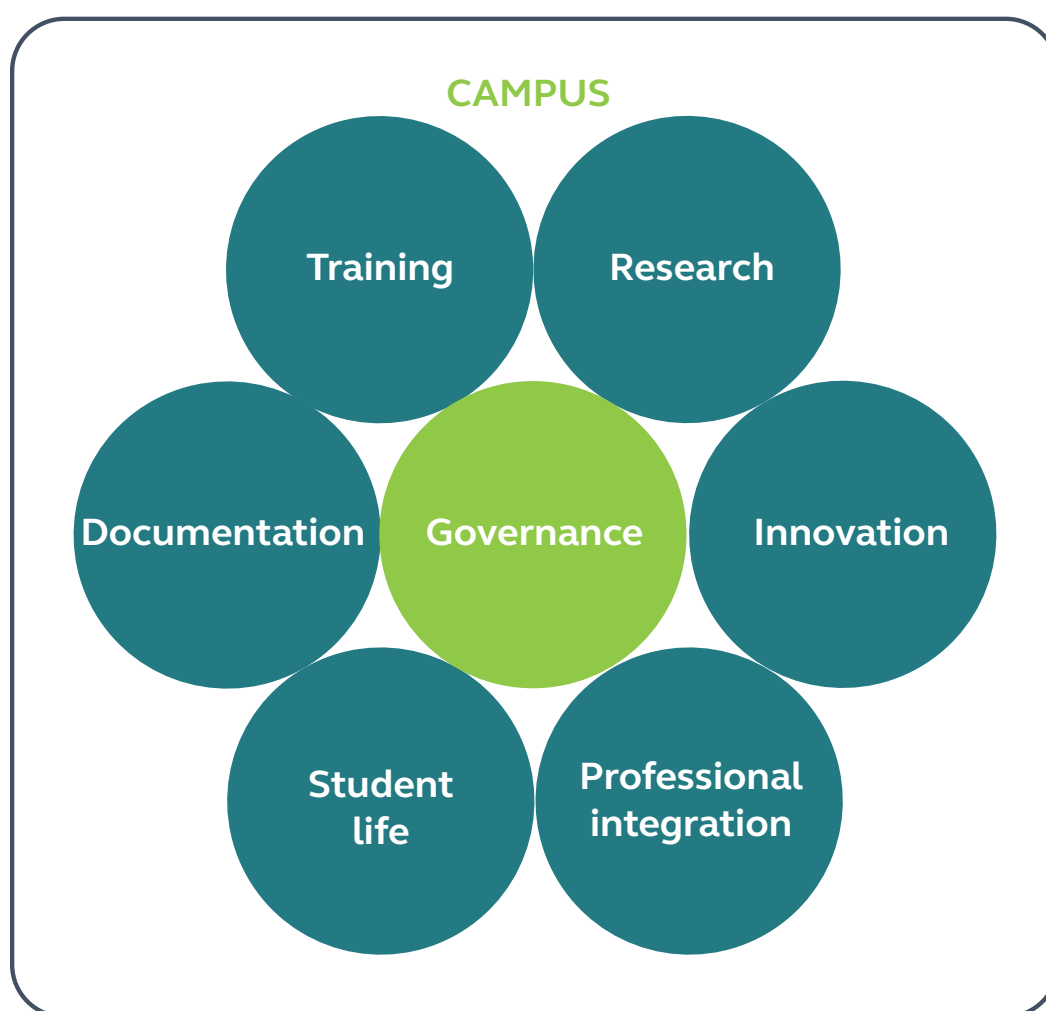
In total, universities' own revenues, including that derived from foundations, represent, in their diversity, about 5.5% of their resources. They are negligible and, for many of them, destined to remain so. Other own resources are in fact minimal: the LRU law gives the opportunity to create partnership foundations which currently provide limited resources to universities (€17.6 million in 2017). Likewise, if the Initial Finance Act for 2018 inserted into the General Public Entities Property Code [*code général de la propriété des personnes publiques*] a provision which authorises higher education establishments to develop their assets, the operations likely to free up financial resources are difficult to estimate and are, in any case, only marginal.

2 - OVERCOMING THE SECOND STAGE

The Court's recent work makes it possible to distinguish several levers of action that may remove various obstacles which hamper the development of universities with greater autonomy and responsibilities. The options available make it possible to respond to a new definition of what the university could be by

2030. This is a perspective where progression, experiments and volunteering all have their place. The autonomy of universities is not seen as an end in itself, but as the condition of a contract between the university's public service and society.

Graph 3: what actions can the university focus on up to 2030?



Source: Court of Accounts

A - The path to greater autonomy in the management of universities

A reform of the system for allocating resources to universities appears necessary, on condition, however, that they undertake to balance their income and expenditure. Such a requirement cannot be met with current contracts, which are too changeable and lack any constraints in the event of non-compliance with their provisions. As recommended by the Court in June 2021 in its report *A public finance strategy to exit the crisis*, the university of tomorrow, like other state operators, could have a multiyear contract with five-year goals and resources (CPOM [*contrat pluriannuel d'objectifs et de moyens*]), in which central government and the university would make reciprocal, lasting and verifiable commitments. The university would gain from this in managing its multiyear goals; central government could lay down the conditions of its financing in the CPOM. The CPOM should be understood as an instrument which conveys in an individualised way the purpose and added value of each establishment in terms of training and research. The HCERES evaluations should contribute more to calculating the needs and opportunities for savings and supply the essential progress reports of the CPOM. This scenario for improving the managerial instruments presupposes reliable cost accounting and therefore a substantial improvement in information systems, an objective regularly reiterated by the Court.

In order to free up new funding, without returning to the aforementioned issue of enrolment fees, two scenarios should be explored. The first would be to cap the research tax credit. The tax expenditure thus saved would allow central government to redeploy significant budgetary resources to

universities, for education and research

The second would involve authorising universities to create all types of subsidiaries, thus departing from the principle of specialisation of public institutions. They would gain a new dynamism from them for their own resources, including for training. Certain universities, in particular scientific ones, have moreover already tried to create subsidiaries in the few rare cases provided for by law; this is particularly the case in Lyon and Bordeaux.

The responsible university should have new freedom to carry out its recruitment strategy and human resources policy. This would involve going back over the impossibility which university presidents encounter in promoting administrative staff or in appointing, except in certain experimental establishments, department heads. It follows that career progression, promotions and exemptions from teaching or research should be based on differentiated career monitoring and continuous evaluation (proportion of teaching, administrative activities, quality of research, etc.) carried out by the university itself. A simplification of recruitment procedures, and of administrative, technical, social, health and library sector personnel (BIATSS), the management of which is still very centralised, should be initiated. For the recruitment of research professors, qualification and selection procedures should be reviewed and, no doubt, a reform of the National Council of Universities (CNU) should be considered; doctorates awarded by universities should be repositioned and enhanced. Mistrust of this academic title largely explains the use of external qualifications implemented by the CNU.

The question also arises concerning the

university's responsibility for its research.

Observed by the Court in some of its work, the unintelligible organisation of joint research units (UMRs) is a source of financial risk and administrative disorder, and sometimes also results in a lack of scientific transparency. To be competitive research operators, French universities would have to meet the standards applied in other countries, which is not possible if they are unable to manage the laboratories located on their sites. To do this, management of the UMRs could be fully delegated to them. From this perspective, it would be desirable for the researchers attached to these units to also be integrated and merge with those of research professors, so that the university becomes the sole employer (and is thus able to pay subsidies). These employees would thus be responsible for a teaching mission, which would seek to strengthen the supervision of students enrolled in all university courses and would further improve the link between training and research. The organisations would, for their part, become funding agencies, specialised in the areas concerning them, and their regional establishments would disappear, thus bringing about significant economies of scale throughout the country. The prospect of merging these organisations with the National Research Agency (ANR) could eventually be considered.

The need to train management teams, taken in their broad sense (presidents, vice-presidents, representatives, heads of university departments (UFRs) or laboratories), before they assume their duties, seems even greater as the technical nature of the actions devolved to institutions has increased. This mid-career stage would allow the university world to prepare a pool of expertise to access managerial functions. This support could be provided by organisations specialising in the

field of public management, such as the new National Institute of Public Service [*Institut national du service public*]. As the function of the general managers of services (DGS) is strategic, it would seem appropriate that the status of the individuals called upon to perform such functions be strengthened. Similarly, it would be wise to diversify the composition of the Boards of Governors and the recruitment processes.

It is in keeping with the transition to greater responsibilities that universities become owners of their assets, in order to carry out maintenance more effectively and gradually bring them in line with safety standards with regard to the rules in force in terms of safety, the environment and accessibility for people with reduced mobility. The creation of subsidiaries established as "university property companies", in charge of this property portfolio, is one avenue which could professionalise its management.

B - University, the place for student success and centre for student life

In keeping with the provisions enacted by the LRU law, universities should offer more training in line with changes in the labour market and employment opportunities.

This obligation, which is imposed on initial training or apprenticeships, applies all the more to continuing education, the benefits of which could, thanks to a welcome change in regulations, be added to the general budget on the basis of consistent and logical pricing for each training course. Student entrepreneurship and, more broadly, interaction throughout their studies with the world of work, through an internship policy or placement, should become common training methods.

Distance learning, in which interest has been shown due to the health crisis, allows, without being a substitute for face-to-face teaching, educational innovations and offers undeniable simplicity. The development of hybrid teaching models, in addition to the savings in operating costs that it could generate, could prompt a review of the teacher-student relationship, in particular to reinforce it. It could also promote educational alliances between French and European universities, offering new training opportunities for students. This digital challenge requires investment in their distance learning capability through ergonomic tools and properly adapted infrastructure.

As universities are there to serve students, they should more generally be rethought of as a centre for student life. Better prepared thanks to reinforced guidance mechanisms from secondary school onwards and based on specific modules provided by properly trained head teachers, the university should of course first appear as a vehicle for intellectual achievement, success and professional integration, but also as a space of well-being. To this end and in order to improve the consideration of needs, universities could **take over, through subsidiaries, the remit of the CROUS [regional centres providing student services] and integrate the staff, resources and skills assigned to them.** They would thus be direct points of contact for students in matters of accommodation, meals, health, cultural life or scholarships. Such a development could only strengthen the sense of belonging and recognition students have in respect of their university.

C - The university college track

Universities have a shared public service responsibility even if each one is permitted to

seek out and assert its uniqueness, whether it concerns the disciplines and specialities taught, the training available, the fields of research and its development or employment opportunities. However, this differentiation must be regulated to avoid the establishment of a multi-tier university system, with privileged institutions and those left behind, and in order to distribute public resources more fairly.

The performance and improvement in results of undergraduate training constitute a determining objective in itself as well as for the allocation of associated funding.

One avenue merits further consideration: that of the university college. Each university could create a university college within it, accommodating all training with two or three years' higher education (general bachelor's degrees, university bachelor of technology - BUT), or possibly also preparatory classes for the *grandes écoles* and higher education vocational sections [*sections de techniciens supérieurs*]. This model would therefore concern the common integration of students with school status, higher education vocational sections (262,000) and preparatory classes for *grandes écoles* (85,000). The landscape would be easier to understand for secondary school students, whose choice would be simpler at the end of the baccalaureate. The courses within university colleges could no longer be organised by disciplines (corresponding to the sections of the CNU) but according to a gradual specialisation within major disciplinary fields (humanities, life sciences, etc.) which would give everyone the time to find their path. The more specialised teaching of preparatory classes for the *grandes écoles* could be added to this. University colleges could then be assigned all or some of the secondary school teachers working in preparatory classes and

higher education vocational sections. These jobs would be added to those of research professors.

Ultimately, universities that wish to do so could decide to focus their training offer primarily on the university college and be financially supported for this purpose.

With the establishment of the university college, the aim is also to increase the student-teacher ratio, in order to achieve the best standards of OECD countries.

If it is adopted, such a transformation of the university system towards more autonomy and responsibility should inevitably be accompanied by a clarification of the powers between central government and local government, insufficiently involved in university strategy. Called on to finance certain actions on an ad hoc basis, local government does not participate in the contractual dialogue

conducted by central government and is not a signatory of a "five-year" contract. In order to involve them more, in particular the regions, established as leaders in higher education and research by the NOTRe law, the negotiation and signing of contracts between the regions and universities within their jurisdiction would allow universities to be more firmly rooted in the region.

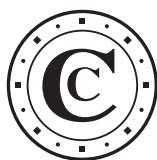
REFERENCES TO THE WORK OF THE COURT OF ACCOUNTS

The Court has carried out a great deal of work in recent years on which it has drawn, in particular the following publications:

- *A public finance strategy to exit the crisis*, June 2021;
- *Le Haut conseil de l'évaluation de la recherche et de l'enseignement supérieur* [The High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education], observations to the minister, June 2021;
- *Le Centre national de la recherche scientifique et les sciences humaines et sociales* [The National Centre for Scientific Research and Human and Social Sciences], observations to the minister, April 2021;
- *Note d'exécution budgétaire pour 2020* [Budget implementation note for 2020], April 2021;
- *The relationship between the state and its operators*, report requested by the National Assembly's public policy assessment and monitoring committee, January 2021;
- *Un premier bilan de l'accès à l'enseignement supérieur dans le cadre de la loi orientation et réussite des étudiants* [An initial assessment of access to higher education within the framework of the law on the guidance and success of students], communication to the National Assembly's Public Policy Assessment and Monitoring Committee, February 2020;
- *Les droits d'inscription dans l'enseignement supérieur public* [Enrolment fees in public higher education], communication to the National Assembly's Finance, General Economy and Budgetary Control Committee, November 2018;
- *Initiatives d'excellence et politique de regroupement universitaire* [Initiatives of excellence and university regrouping policy], observations to the minister, June 2018;
- *L'autonomie financière des universités, une réforme à poursuivre* [The financial autonomy of universities, a reform to be pursued], communication to the Senate's Finance Committee, September 2015;
- *Le réseau des œuvres universitaires et scolaires : une modernisation indispensable* [The network of university and school works: an essential modernisation], annual public report, February 2015;

The Court of Accounts has also used the final (unpublished) observations that it sent to the following universities: Burgundy, Limoges and Paris XIII in 2021, Paris I, Strasbourg and Versailles Saint Quentin in 2020, Avignon and Bordeaux in 2019, EZUS Lyon, Lyon III, Paris 4 and Paris 6 in 2018, Artois, Lille 2, Lille 3, Toulouse II and Toulouse III in 2017, and Avignon, Toulouse I and Valenciennes in 2016.

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