



PRESS RELEASE

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Public thematic report

HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE CHALLENGE OF THE ECOLOGICAL TRANSITION

Higher education institutions play a special role in the ecological transition. Representing almost half of all State operators and catering for a large number of people, they have a substantial environmental impact. Numerous initiatives have been taken in recent years, and policies are beginning to be put in place within institutions. However, they are still not sufficient to achieve the stated objectives, particularly as they lack many of the tools needed to develop a rigorous, coherent and effective approach. Yet higher education has a major role to play, not only in reducing its own ecological footprint, but also in producing, adapting and disseminating the knowledge needed to make a success of the ecological transition.

Governance of the ecological transition remains imperfect

Although initiatives in favour of the ecological transition are emerging in higher education institutions, the issues are not always brought before their boards of governors and planning remains weak. Periodic assessments of greenhouse gas emissions and certification procedures are still not widespread enough. There is a lack of quantitative indicators, and budgetary issues relating to the ecological transition are not regularly reviewed. Even though there has been significant progress since 2022, these institutions continue to be under-represented in the corresponding international rankings, despite the fact that the ecological transition policy could help to raise their profile. In November 2022, the Ministry of Higher Education and Research (MESR) adopted its climate and biodiversity plan. Although it has signed contracts of objectives, resources and performance (COMP) with some of the institutions, it does not have the tools needed to find out where they stand in terms of sustainable development and to evaluate the implementation of the provisions of its plan. Despite the large number of players involved in the ecological transition in higher education, there is no body to coordinate their actions.

Training: clear awareness, but ambition not yet realised

There are many different ways of raising awareness within institutions. Following the publication in 2022 of a report on raising awareness of the challenges of the ecological transition in higher education, some institutions have included modules dealing with these issues in the compulsory core curriculum for the first cycle of higher education. The number of degree courses devoted to the ecological transition is increasing, and initiatives are being developed to reflect on their content. Continuous training is too restricted for administrative staff, teachers and doctoral students. Adapted reference frameworks for expected skills already exist, such as *Greencomp* at European level, in order to develop training courses. However, it is

vital that a process of adapting teaching methods to the ecological transition can be developed. Teachers must be convinced of this need and feel involved in this development. This is the role of training or instructional design specialists, whose role should be developed further.

The ecological impact of research activities: greater management and evaluation required

Research geared towards the ecological transition is developing rapidly, and its content is based on the programming of the French National Research Agency (ANR) and France 2030. It represents a major challenge for higher education institutions, which are not always developing a coherent strategy in this area. Research activities have their own impact in terms of GHG emissions and the environment, of which the use of research buildings and equipment are the most important components. Some researchers from the Labos 1Point5 research group have designed a tool to measure GHG emissions at laboratory level, which could be of benefit to all institutions. As part of its evaluation process for research units, the High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (HCERES) introduced a “sustainable development” criterion in 2018. It has since been expanded, but its scope is only just beginning to take shape. This criterion also deserves to be supplemented by a systematic examination of the implementation of a GHG emissions assessment and a sustainable development action plan.

Institution and campus management

The inflationary context since 2022 has revealed the vulnerability of institutions with regard to their energy consumption. In autumn 2022, the government asked them to draw up an energy efficiency programme. A national roadmap calls for energy performance targets to be incorporated into multi-annual property strategy plans (SPSI). However, these plans either do not exist or, where they do, have not been updated. Neither the State’s property department nor the Ministry of Higher Education and Research (MESR) have drawn up a comprehensive renovation strategy for university real estate assets. Funding - which often favours speed of implementation over ecological performance - means that major renovation work is excluded. As a result, different institutions are adopting different measures to manage their campuses with regard to the ecological transition. Measures have been taken to adapt to climate change and to protect biodiversity, but there is no real overall coherence. At both institutional and ministerial level, there is a lack of guidance based on indicators and multi-year programming of funding.

[Read the report](#)

PRESS CONTACT:

Julie Poissier ■ Head of Media & Social Networks ■ T +33 (0)6 87 36 52 21 ■ julie.poissier@ccomptes.fr



@Courdescomptes



ccomptes



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