



RÉPUBLIQUE
FRANÇAISE

*Liberté
Égalité
Fraternité*



ARCHITECTURE TEACHING ORGANIZATION IN FRANCE AND IN THE CLERMONT-FERRAND ARCHITECTURE SCHOOL

1. Organisation of architecture teaching in France

In France, architecture education is organised through twenty-two higher education establishments:

Twenty Écoles Nationales Supérieures d'Architecture (ENSA) (National Schools of Architecture)

- 6 of these are in the Paris area (the most populated region of France with an approximate population of 12 million) and four schools in the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes Region (second biggest region in France with around 8 million people).
- The twenty schools are public administrative establishments under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture while French universities are the responsibility of the Ministry of Higher Education and Research. The Ministry of Culture exercises educational and scientific oversight over all these courses and guarantees consistency across the teaching content.
- The twenty public schools are autonomous. Thus, until recently, the ENSAs were not integrated into universities. However, these are currently discussions underway with universities and some of them will become part of a university.
- Studies are organised via two degree programmes leading to the State Architecture Degree (DEA). The first cycle is three years long and leads to an undergraduate degree in architecture studies (DEAA). It allows you to work as a draftsman within an architecture or urban planning office or a design office. The second two-year degree leads to a master's degree in State Architecture Degree (DEA).
- People who wish to become a practicing architect and work under their own name must pass a project management exam. You can sit this a year after the State Architecture Degree (DEA), ideally after a few years' experience in an architecture agency.
- Many ENSA offer a 3rd degree programme leading to a Doctorate in Architecture (after 3 years). Those with a State Architecture Degree can continue their studies through a specialised and in-depth architecture degree (DSA) over 1 or 2 years. These degrees are themed, the issue of built heritage or major risks for example.
- Some ENSAs offer a joint honours course by partnering with engineering school, leading to a joint honours degree in architecture and engineering. The organisation of joint honours degrees vary depending on the schools but they normally last 7 years in total.
- Two of them, Bordeaux and Lille, also offer a state degree in landscaping.
- Despite a shared programme, each architecture has specific features.

Two other schools offer degrees recognised by the Ministry of Culture

A public engineering school, INSA Strasbourg, has an architecture department. It offers a 5-year course in architecture reinforced by engineering. These studies result in a bachelor's degree in architecture and engineering (undergraduate degree) and a INSA architecture degree which is the equivalent to the State Architecture Degree (DEA).

→ The ESA Paris is a private school which offers an equivalent degree to the twenty public schools.

Lastly, **L'École de Chaillot** created in 1887, became the City of Architecture and Heritage training school in 2005. Faithful to its original mission, it delivers post-graduate training in everything from monuments and historic centres to ordinary heritage. It trains heritage architects specialising in architectural, urban and landscape conservation and restoration as well as State Architects and Town planners.

2. Multi-disciplinary training

Architecture training combines lessons focused on architecture (the architectural and urban project history and theory of architecture and the city, representation of space) enriched and punctuated with expertise from other disciplines (the arts, sociology, history, science and technology, town planning, landscaping, IT, modern languages).

Any student with a French baccalaureate or the equivalent, regardless of the subject, is welcome to apply for entry into first year of studies at the architecture school of their choice.

3. A few figures

France is one of the European countries which trains the least architects with 30,000 registered architects with 56,000 in Spain, 111,000 in Germany and 160,000 in Italy. The average age of an architect in France is 51 which suggests a shortage to come over the next decade.

The number of students at the twenty Écoles nationales supérieures d'architecture (ENSA) have been stable for the last twenty years with up to 20,000 students. However, training is clearly attractive with only 15% of those applying to ENSA are successful. This popularity is testament to the huge efforts made by schools since the 2005 and 2018 reforms, placing the institutions in the higher education landscape.

The ENSAs have increased the number of joint honour degrees with engineering, arts, landscaping and business schools as well political science and town planning institutes and universities. They include eco-construction, interventions in existing systems, regeneration of territories, mediation, digital modelling, and research activities in initial training. They have created several specialised degrees in heritage, major risks, post-carbon design and town planning.

The student population is fairly equal gender wise (60% women), a range of financial backgrounds (30% scholarships) coming from all general, technological, and professional baccalaureate programmes. Some architecture schools have developed continuous professional vocation training leading to professional retraining or an apprenticeship masters. The result is an 85% professional integration in their skill area for graduates after three years and 71% having a secure job.

Teaching staff are mostly practitioners, making up 70% of architectural project teachers. The twenty ENSAs have around 1000 tenured or associate teachers with 10% being professors and 70% lecturers but also contractual teachers. A growing number of teachers are undertaking research activities.

4. Clermont-Ferrand Architecture School (ENSACF)

The Clermont-Ferrand Architecture School has now been running for 53 years. It is one of the four schools in the large Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes Region. The three others are Lyon, Grenoble, and Saint-Etienne.

Clermont-Ferrand is one of France's 21 large cities. It's located in the heart of the Massif Central, a vast medium mountain area in the middle of France.

The school is in a former hospital, a sanatorium built in the 1930s and transformed into the architecture school in the 2010s.

The premises of our school testifies what an existing heritage project can look like. Our school shows that in a given moment, for a particular project, a thoughtful and talented architect can carry the seeds of a possible conversion which can house a new programme and new uses without losing the building's soul.

Set in the Puy de Chanturgue hills in the north of Clermont-France, our school also offers extraordinary views of the city: the historic hill of Clermont, the old medieval village of Montferrand, the industrial Michelin facilities and its worker cities. But from the rooftop, you can also admire the Limagne plain with some of the most fertile fields in Europe, eaten away by urbanisation and mobility infrastructure little by little, the Livradois mountains with newly planted conifer forests which occupied whole sections of deserted rural areas, the iconic Puy mountain chain which are classified as a UNESCO world heritage site and, from the foot of the school, a few plots of vines which revive the viticulture decimated by the phylloxera crisis at the end of the 19th century. So much can be explained from this roof!

This ability to understand the area from our school site illustrates the notions of “location” and “environment” as well as the concept of “the interweaving scales” which characterise our school’s specific teaching.

While all French schools seem to defend the international as a capital training dimension, the Clermont-France School is turning more towards its local environment, the Massif Central and small and medium-sized towns.

The school is very attentive to its environment for many reasons. We believe that an establishment like ours should aim to stimulate local public debate on the transformation of the living environment by providing a form of expertise through student work, cultural actions carried out by the school and the work of our doctorates and teacher-researchers.

Following in Dennis Meadow’s footsteps, I will say that it’s our establishment’s consensus that it’s too late to imagine sustainable development planned from above. At least that’s what I think. It’s about moving territory lines very concretely and avoiding the pitfalls of projects above ground.

In its development plan, the school therefore reinscribed the idea that the Massif Central area, vast in diversity, offers avenues for educational and research deployments which are of interest to public authorities while allowing ENSACF students to confront reality. More specifically, we reaffirm our desire to question rural areas and small and medium-sized centralities in line with the public policies promoted by the government. This desire is also part of one of our traditions: the notion of development or transformation of the rural environment has existed since the 1980s.

In a critical situation where the metropolitan concentrations show limits (demographic density, stress, pollution, land availability and cost, etc.), we are convinced that other scenarios have to be invented. The town centres of rural or suburban areas offer a stimulating field of experimentation for students where contemporary architecture has its place. Previously associated with unattractive inertia, the contemporary critical conditions, and challenges of tomorrow (recycling, economy of means, ecology of resources, agriculture, redefinition of relationships with animals, etc.) make rural areas and small centralities the matrixes for stimulating questions and responsible commitment. The numerous educational workshops take place in the community are organised throughout the university course, both at bachelors and masters level, in partnership with local collectives and regional natural parks.

While ENSACF is interested in its local geography, it nevertheless pays close attention to balancing its interests “here” and “elsewhere” by reaffirming its commitment to the development of a greater architectural, urban and culture. Targeted long-haul travel provides a better understanding of otherness, breaks in scale, the history of urbanism and territories. The school also aims to explore the transformation of rural areas in other continents, particularly in Asia. We’re looking for partnership opportunities to include in our educational programme for next four years.

In line with our specialised studies, our Joint Research Unit, under the joint supervision of the Ministry of Culture and Clermont Auvergne University, has chosen the theme of “margins” as a research topic. Margins can be considered as critiques, transgressions, resistance, deviance, resilience but sometimes also as permanence, resurgence, or experimentation. It’s about cultivating the idea that the most relevant solutions to a problem are not found within a dominant system but from its margins.

Finally, ENSACF reaffirms its interest in the pedagogy of experimentation: workshops outside of walls, design build, questions linked to the rehabilitation of existing heritage, environmental issues with former urban or rural fabrics (town centres, city centres) favouring “low tech” strategies, reuse and more generally reduce the environmental impact of building production centres.

For us, thinking about low tech is not a thing of the past. Doing less and being sustainable doesn’t mean turning your back on innovation, knowledge, and research. Quite the contrary. Low technologies question the amount of energy used to design, represent, and produce buildings or construction, the resources used, moving materials, operating methods depending on whether one is on the craftsmanship register or robotisation, the ecology of demand, renunciation of the source, reparability, relocation, reuse, etc.

They question our ability to respond to the dead ends we're faced with today: deadlock caused by the depletion of resources, soil consumption and degradation, also probably a moral dead end... At this school, we collectively feel that it's high time to change the software.

To conclude, the École Nationale d'Architecture de Clermont-Ferrand has set itself an ambitious objective for the educational programme over the next four years.

The challenges that await architects, and our future students, are considerable. The depletion of resources, the new climate regime, the collapse of biodiversity, the waste and degradation of soils, the collapse of many small centralities, glaring social inequalities, the demographic question are all subjects which directly impact the construction and building sector.

The Covid-19 health crisis has only highlighted the dead ends we're facing. ENSACF has decided to question itself even more in the face of this global crisis to better equip its students.

The first invites us to better consider our relationship with economic and social realities which tell us about the links between humans within the society they participate in at different scales (family, community, school, territory, the planet). It asks about our ability to develop a collaborative spirit. The second questions our subjectivity, our ability to identify with the world and cultivate invention and otherness.

We want to embody these three ecologies better in the future. We want our students to be better equipped to create stimulating imaginations and summon new paradigms to build the world of tomorrow.

Like students, teacher-researchers are learners. It's about exploring the unknown together and collectively imagining the solutions of tomorrow.