

# Postdoctoral Careers in Europe: France







## Introduction

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Whether you are in the final stages of your doctorate or have just finished, you will probably be planning your next career move. One of the questions you will be asking yourself is whether to stay in your native country or embark on an academic career abroad. If you decide on the latter, Europe will almost certainly be on your shortlist of possible destinations. This eBook is for postdocs interested in starting or continuing their academic career in France.

A country of Nobel Prize winners, artists, writers, philosophers, mathematicians and scientists, France's intellectual credentials are infinite. Home to a world-renowned higher education system, a commitment to research is built into the French cultural psyche.

In this ebook, you will find out about the different higher education systems, and gain valuable insights into funding options, career advancement, the job market in each country and practical ways to get a foot in the door.

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## Research and Funding

A combination of top-level funding, an international approach and the establishment of a number of elite subject-specific institutions has led to France being one of the most respected and competitive research nations in the world. Research expenditure amounts to around 2.256% of GDP, and France is ranked above the UK in terms of investment. Research is carried out in universities, Grandes Écoles and public institutes such as the [National Centre for Scientific Research \(CNRS\)](#), the largest science agency in Europe, and other public research institutes such as [INRA](#) and medical research facility [INSERM](#).

French research employs over 400,000 people across the public and private sectors. State funding is allocated by the [French National Research Agency](#), a public body falling under the authority of the Ministry of Higher Education and Research.

## Career Progression

Academic career advancement in France is complex, and breaking into the job market requires a great deal of patience and steely determination. The ability to speak French to a high level is essential - particularly for early career researchers - to be in with a chance of winning a position. Tenured academics are considered to be civil servants and enjoy a high degree of job security, so gaining one of these coveted positions can be attractive for incoming researchers.

The first rung on the career ladder in a university or public research institute is usually in the form of a temporary postdoc role (Attaché Temporaire d'Enseignement et de Recherche), usually applied for in the last year of a PhD, and comprising teaching and research. There is also a teaching-only path, which is on the whole populated by specially trained secondary school teachers; a doctorate is not required. The first permanent or tenured position would be Associate Professor (Maître de Conférences) followed by Professor, which involve both research and teaching.

It is not necessary to have completed a postdoc phase to apply for permanent Associate Professor positions, but a high standard of qualifications and research are a prerequisite for these coveted roles in such a competitive market.

## The Higher Education System

France has a complex system of higher education, divided into 83 public universities and around 250 mixed public or private 'Grandes Écoles,' small elite institutions similar to Ivy League schools in the States, which sit outside the main university framework. Established by Napoleon, Grandes Écoles train the politicians, scientists and engineers of the future and admission is by a highly selective entrance exam. The majority of universities are state-funded and students (both EU and non-EU) pay a small annual tuition fee of around €181 (\$210). Students will pay more at the elite schools, which are able to set their own fees. Grandes Écoles are generally subject-specific institutions and contribute to the bulk of France's research activities, with strong links to industry. The highest ranking universities are École Normale Supérieure and École Polytechnique ParisTech (both Grandes Écoles).

Overall, French higher education offers around 36,000 courses, with some partially taught in English, although French remains the dominant language in both teaching and research. In universities, degrees follow the undergraduate (three years) and Masters (divided into 'research and 'professional/vocational', 2 years) two-tier system dictated by the EU's Bologna Process. The system is slightly different in Grandes Écoles, and includes two years of preparatory study known as 'classes préparatoires aux grandes écoles' (CPGE) and offer a basic qualification equivalent to a Master's degree. PhDs take around three to four years to complete, and many are paid positions.

Like most other things in France, higher education is highly centralised, and overall management is the responsibility of the [Ministry of Higher Education and Research](#), which wields considerable influence over budgets and policy.





# Salaries

Academic and research salaries are set by the Ministry of Higher Education and Research, and are comparable with the USA and UK.

**Average academic salaries in France** (gross monthly salary):

- Postdoc researcher: €3,000
- Associate Professor: €2,100 to €4,400
- Full professor: €3,000 to €6,000

France has an above average cost of living, particularly in Paris. However, many foreign academics are willing to overcome this to have the opportunity to work within French education and research. Furthermore, the country offers the world's highest-ranking healthcare system and fantastic working conditions, such as 35-hour week and generous holiday allowance.

To find out more about working and living in France, visit our country profile [here](#).

# The Job Market

The academic job market in France is highly competitive, particularly in universities and Grandes Écoles. Although job vacancies in universities are open to foreigners (academics are the only civil servants in France who do not have to hold French nationality), the system is largely staffed by French nationals, and competition for postdoctoral posts is fierce. Foreigners who have not studied or have not already spent time as a postdoc in France seldom obtain a tenured position at French universities. Fluency in French is also a must in order to get a foot in the door.

A career in a public research institute such as the CNRS or INRA, which tend to be more foreigner-friendly, is the main alternative to a career at a university. Research institute jobs are generally temporary but offer the opportunity to gain experience in some of the world's most advanced research environments. Positions are listed on the CNRS, INRA or INSERM websites in early December. Alternatively, you can search jobs at French universities, research organisations and companies at [jobs.ac.uk](https://jobs.ac.uk).

# Job Application Process

The application process for academic and research jobs in France depends on what type of job you are applying for, in a university or public research institute:

**Universities/Grandes Écoles:** The application process for positions at universities is highly centralised, and there are a number of stages to complete before even putting pen to paper. Although there are temporary postdoc positions available in universities, most are concentrated in public research institutes. The first permanent position in a French university is commonly an Associate/Assistant professor/Lecturer role. To apply, you will first need to enrol for a 'qualification' with the French University Council through the GALAXIE/ANTARES online [portal](#), which can take place before your PhD defense. You will need to complete a number of complex steps to gain enrolment to this 'list' of potential academics. Once you are enrolled, you can start applying to jobs in the university system through the portal. It would be highly uncommon to have direct contact with the university until you are shortlisted. You can find more information about applying to the French university system at the [Ministry of Higher Education and Research](#).

**Public Research Institutes (CNRS/INRA/INSERM etc.)** have their own strict application procedures for early career researchers. You will need to complete a detailed online application form which has a six to ten page section requiring you to outline your research plans. Postdoctoral application rounds are advertised at specific times of the year. See each institute's website for further information.

**Application Tip:** Unless otherwise stated, you should write your application in French, so your language skills will need to be advanced. It's a good idea have a French person look over your application as the French have very high attention to detail – any mistakes could see your application being removed to the bottom of the pile.





## Work Permit

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IEU/EEA citizens do not require work permits to find employment in France. Non-EU nationals will need to navigate the complicated work permit process and will also require a firm offer of employment before relocating to France. For more information about work permits in France visit [L'Office Francais de l'Immigration](#).

## About this ebook

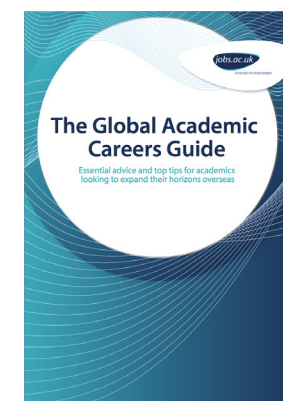
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'Postdoctoral Careers in France' has been compiled by jobs.ac.uk as part of the 'Postdoctoral Careers in Europe' series, helping you take your first step into the European academic world.

Europe is one of the most popular destinations for freshly-minted doctorates. Ancient and prestigious universities, excellent funding opportunities and diverse research networks attract thousands of international students, postdocs and academics to Europe each year. Add to this the prevalent use of English as a working language and a commitment to international cooperation in research which is unparalleled worldwide, Europe has much to offer aspiring academics.

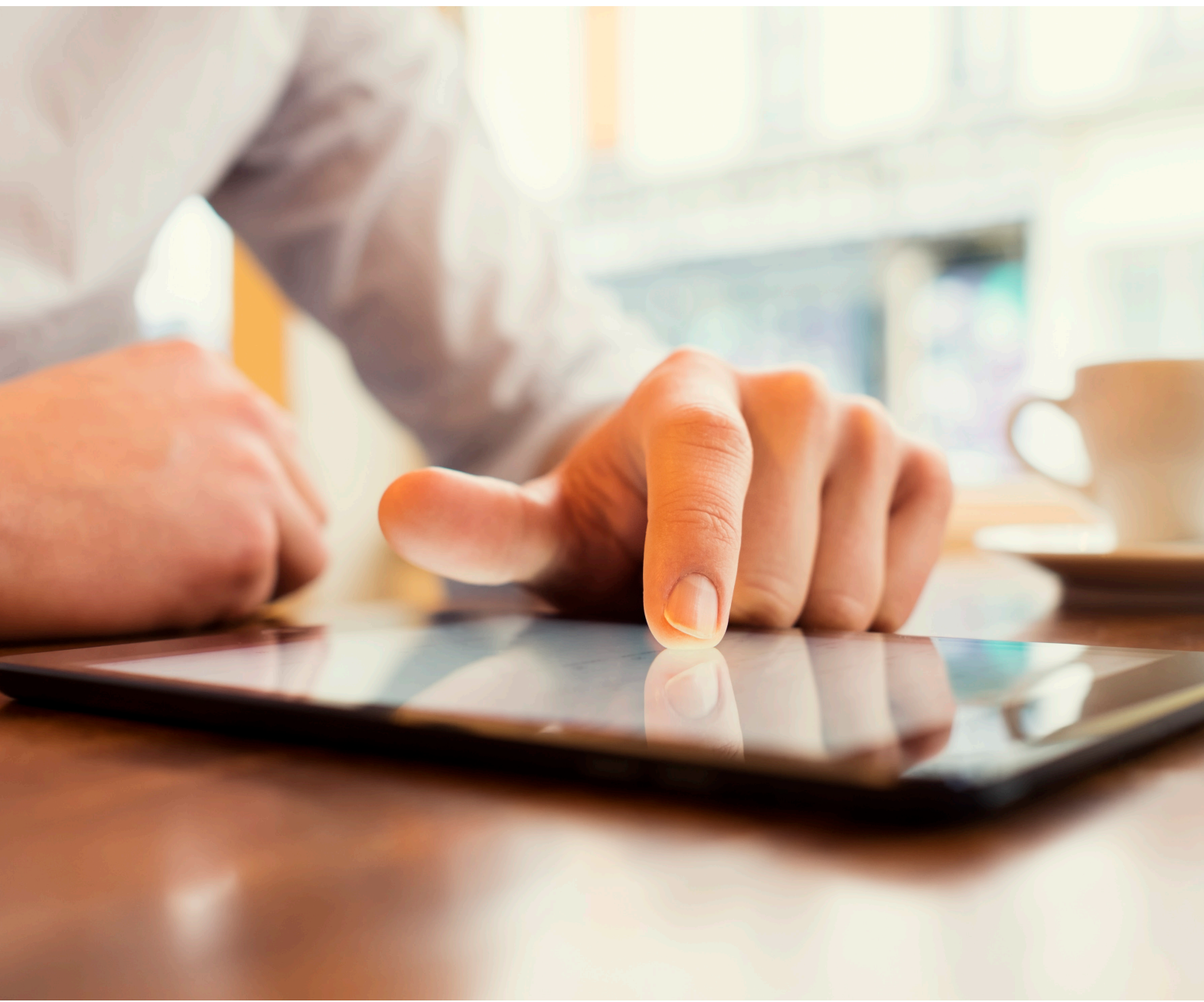
Combined, the European Union member states invest almost €300 billion in research and development each year. There is a strong tradition of cross-border collaboration, providing a unique research perspective, as well as offering ample opportunities to work with colleagues across the continent. Whether you choose a job in a European university, research institute or company, you will experience fantastic research facilities, generous funding and progressive working conditions.

## Recommended reading:



### The Global Academic Careers Guide

Essential advice and top tips for academics looking to expand their horizons overseas. This ebook will tell you more about the scale of the new global market, help you consider the pros and cons of seeking employment outside your nation of origin, and give you important information that will improve your success rate if you do decide to give working abroad a try.





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