

Our youth must become a major national cause!

French rectors' manifesto for a public higher education and research system to meet future challenges and convene a national youth assembly. Those who are our future must be placed at the heart of the debate leading up to the 2027 presidential election.

A critical situation

French rectors, together with the directors of public institutions, solemnly raise the alarm about the movement currently underway on numerous campuses across France. This movement is taking forms that will only lead to rising tensions: intolerable acts of vandalism and verbal abuse in recent weeks testify to the fact. Sadly, these forms of protest appear to be the sole means left to compel if not active listening, then at least some form of acknowledgment from the state's highest authority.

How much violence must we endure before we can begin to move forward again? How many university staff members will have to carry on, day in and day out, and go above and beyond what is reasonable to barely maintain a space for work and study in the face of severe cutbacks, on the one hand, and escalating demands, on the other?

Our universities are in a dire situation, while they are the space where needed knowledge and skills are forged. France Universités has warned for years against the gradual deterioration of study and working conditions in higher education and research institutions. We simply no longer have the means to carry out our public service mission and uphold the republican commitment to equal opportunity for all. Current protests should not come as a surprise but as a logical consequence of the restrictions and lack of trust faced by public institutions dedicated to educating and supporting the youth.

Immediate required measures

France Universités calls for immediate announcements to defuse the situation. As the latter deteriorates day after day in our institutions, it exposes staff and students to additional risks. Parcoursup is currently the focus of all attention: it can and should be improved, but must not become a convenient scapegoat to mask the reality of the extreme financial difficulties our institutions are faced with.

The Conference on University Funding in 2026 concluded in a call for a structural adjustment to operating grants for up to one billion euros. We propose to launch an initial recovery phase in 2027, as part of a multi-year plan, centered on three priorities:

1. Establish the battle against student financial insecurity as a national priority.

Reforming need-based grants to increase their amounts, improve their progressivity, and expand access with an additional 340 million euros (in addition to the funds needed for university catering services).

2. Restore the resources universities need to fulfill their mission.

An additional 500 million euros in recurring funding starting in 2027 would fully offset the salary increases and CAS Pensions decided by the government (200 million); revive the HR measures of the LPR (90 million) regarding recruitment and career advancement; fund the reform of access to health studies scheduled for the start of the 2027 academic year (30 million); fund 20,000 additional university seats for students (80 million) and provide the necessary resources to support the new form of contractual arrangements between the government and universities (100 million). This effort should halt the job freeze strategy and gradually rebuild the academic supervision capacity.

3. Launch a major national plan to renovate university campuses

We propose to launch a new, large-scale “Campus” plan dedicated to energy-efficient renovation, climate adaptation of buildings (particularly regarding summertime thermal comfort) and the modernization of educational and scientific spaces. This program would also serve as a powerful catalyst for an economic recovery of the construction and public works sectors, benefiting employment and economic activity across all regions. An emergency 200 million euros fund starting in 2027 would constitute a springboard for a new national real estate investment plan totaling one billion euros per year beginning in 2028.

In total, we propose an additional budgetary allocation of one billion euros starting in 2027 as a first step in an ambitious multi-year program, to be extended in 2028 through a major real estate investment plan of one billion euros per year.

To fund it, we should immediately, prior to reforming it and provide truly effective support for R&D investment, implement a parametric reform of the research tax credit (which costs the government nearly 8 billion euros per year) and eliminate public subsidies for apprenticeships in for-profit private education¹. These would be easily implementable measures.

Let's make youth our great national cause!

Beyond these highly anticipated announcements, France Universités calls for the organization of a national youth forum, bringing together youths of all backgrounds and regions, citizens, civil society organizations and experts to identify major challenges and discuss the choices available to us in the run-up to the 2027 presidential election. The President of the Republic proposal on October 18 to organize discussions with civil society organizations may be a first step but it is clearly underwhelming.

Today's youth are voicing their concerns and their anger, as well as their essential and indispensable need to be heard and enabled to envision a future for themselves. We must

¹ The French Court of Accounts estimates the total amount of public aid benefiting the for-profit private sector totals 1.5 billion euros annually. Between 40% to 70% of for-profit private schools' revenue comes from public funds.

respond to them. Matters concerning our youth are not limited to school or college: they cover employment, housing, health, independence, mobility, the environment, and democracy. It reaches into every corner of our society.

The presidential election is just a few months away. Our initiative can help place the younger generations at the heart of the democratic debate and invite all the candidates to state their position on the proposals emerging from this collective reflection.

Let's not merely react to this crisis. Let's turn this situation into an opportunity to build, together with the youth, a new shared vision for the future.