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The FrancEducation Label, a linguistic and diplomatic asset



The first FrancEducation Labels have just been conferred on foreign schools with bilingual francophone departments of genuine excellence. This new tool is designed to improve the diversity and quality of French teaching abroad, and gives such institutions recognition for their quality as well as access to a whole range of services.

The implementation of the new label is a combined effort by the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs (MAEE), the Ministry of National Education and the Agency for French Teaching Abroad (AEFE). It is conferred on the basis of documentary evidence and

verification on site, via an audit ensuring that the criteria are properly fulfilled, conducted by the diplomatic service and the AEFE.

The criteria are highly demanding.

- The first, for instance, is that at least a third of the teaching must be carried out in French. As Jean-Marc Berthon, assistant director of Linguistic Diversity and French at the MAEE, stresses *“the bar is set very high. Even the flagships of French educational cooperation such as the bi-national baccalaureates in Italy, Spain and Germany do not all meet this criterion”*.

- The second criterion for selection, namely that there must be a teacher accredited by the French Ministry of Education for each grade (primary, secondary, etc.), can be adapted to local situations. The pupils should also take the certifications in French and should have access to a French-speaking environment, for example French content in media libraries, libraries, through twinnings, etc. And finally, the teachers must hold the required qualifications and the institution must have a continuing professional development programme in place.

The FrancEducation Label is valid for three years (after which time a further audit must be carried out). It costs institutions 1200 euros per year, in exchange for which they have the right to display the logo, for instance in the form of a plaque on the façade of their premises and on their communications. This prestigious guarantee of quality affords them recognition and an improved image, but also access to services, which include a fund for financing innovative projects and facilities for recruiting French teachers. Foreign nationals who teach French also have the right to receive training through the Institut Français.



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A meeting will be held in Paris for the heads of departments once a year, giving them an opportunity to share their experiences: *“The idea is to create a club of excellence, a new network alongside that of the French Lycées abroad,”* points out Jean-Marc Berthon. He adds that: *“worldwide, approximately 1.7 million young people are following a bilingual education, in 53 countries. The aim of the Label is to identify the best schools involved in spreading the influence of our culture and in the education of pupils who will themselves later contribute to French influence. It allows these institutions to be promoted and helped to further improve their teaching, encourages others to rise to the highest level and will, perhaps, give the idea of setting up a bilingual department to institutions that do not yet have one”*.

The FrancEducation Label is also a means of disseminating French know-how in the educational sphere and offer teachers new prospects for mobility.

This new tool of French diplomacy is a key element in the development plan for teaching French abroad, which also includes consolidation of the resources of the AEFÉ and the running of the French schools network abroad with, in particular, detailed mapping. The aim is to provide the best possible support for a development that is already taking place. Various factors suggest that the era of the domination of English is over. French-speaking countries are experiencing strong demographic growth: according to the International Organisation of La Francophonie, the present 220 million French speakers will reach 715 million by 2050. In emerging countries, the very open new middle classes are seeking cultural and linguistic diversity. In India, for example, 1,200,000 pupils are learning French, a figure that is growing by 15% each year. *“Our language has a rightful place in an increasingly multi-polar world,”* is the view of Jean-Marc Berthon. So the future seems assured, all the more so since French has a strong presence in the digital world.

The Czech Republic is taking the lion’s share in the first round of FrancEducation Labels. The distinction has been awarded to the Lycées Jan Neruda in Prague, Matyas Lerch in Brno, Pierre de Coubertin in Tabor, and the Lycée Slave in Olomouc. Two of the eight schools in receipt of the Label are in the United States, in New York: The Carroll School and The Lilian Weber School. Another is Finnish: the Aleksanten School in Tempere, whilst another is in Auckland, New Zealand: the Richmond Road School, recognised for its bilingual department *L’Archipel*.

These schools, primary or secondary, public or private, are at the moment often sited in the centres of national capitals or major regional cities. The aim is to label some 50 institutions in 2012-2013, then around 100 in 2013-2014, mainly in Europe and in the countries of the G20.

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