

ITALIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

Education in Italy is state-controlled and all schools, both public and private, are subject to comply with the curricula and teaching methods laid down by the Ministry of Public Education (Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione).

Italian's education is compulsory and free of charge for all children between the ages of 6 and 14; it is segmented into elementary education which lasts for five years and leads to the "Diploma di Licenza della Scuola Elementare" and 3 classes at lower secondary level the scuola media (middle school), at the end of which students, assuming all goes well, receive a "Diploma di Licenza di Scuola Media" and therefore the right to continue their education. Here, at the age of 14, is where obligatory education currently ended and an optional 4 or 5 year course of study begins namely upper secondary education.

By the year 2001 the age of compulsory education shifts upward to 16 years. The traditional liceo and vocational education are replaced by an obligatory two-year period (biennio) of general studies, followed by three more years (triennio) of optional specialised education. New disciplines and special classes are designed to better prepare students for their future careers.

The upper secondary courses consist of classical, scientific, artistic, technical, vocational options. Students may choose from a range of 'High Schools' known as Licei with either classical, linguistic, artistic or scientific specialisation's or move to study at vocational secondary education (Istituto professionale) which prepares students for elementary school teaching as well as technical, commercial and industrial careers.

On completion of their chosen course, students undertake a state composed exam which gives them a "Diploma di Maturità" and hence the right to attend university.

Whether the course is four or five years long is irrelevant, as in the case of a 4 year program an additional year of study must be integrated into the course in order for the student to be granted admission to an Italian university. A Maturità is the minimum admission requirement to university studies, as well as to most programmes at non-university institutions of higher education.

University Higher Education

Higher Education in Italy is based on a system in which universities are expected to fulfill the twin tasks of teaching and research. Academic autonomy and freedom are not only inherent aspects of this approach but also guaranteed by Italian law. Higher education is provided by universities, technical universities, university institutes, as well as by a wide range of academies, higher institutes/schools, especially, but not exclusively, in the artistic sector, and by a number of professional training institutions in a variety of fields related to commerce, e-technologies, fashion, industry, etc... educating over 1.25million students. the university system includes 89 university institutions (55 state universities, 3 technical universities, 17 non-state legally-recognized university institutes, 2 universities for foreigners, 12 higher schools/institutes regulated by special legislation). Most of the existing university institutions were established

directly by the State, while a limited number, originally set up by private entities, were later recognized by the relevant Ministry.

Degree programmes are structured in credits (crediti formativi universitari) CFU at universities and (crediti formativi accademici) CFA.

A CFU or CFA corresponds to a minimum of 25 hours of work, time for personal study included. The average annual workload of a full-time student is usually fixed at 60 credits.

With reforms approved in 2001 and the approval of DM 509/99 the Italian Universities adopted the '3 cycle system':

The first cycle, 3 years in length, and focuses on a curriculum with a professional training bias and culminates with the awarding of a first level degree as defined earlier, Laurea. Undergraduate studies consist in Corsi di Laurea (CL) -first degree courses- which aim at guaranteeing students an adequate command of general scientific methods and contents as well as specific professional skills. The general access requirement is the Italian school leaving qualification, the Diploma di Superamento dell'Esame di Stato conclusivo dei Corsi di Istruzione Secondaria Superiore. Equivalent foreign qualifications may also be accepted. Admission to individual degree courses may be subject to specific requirements. The Laurea (L) -first degree- is awarded to undergraduates who have obtained 180 credits.

The second cycle will last 2 years and will end with the awarding of a Laurea Specializzata. Graduate studies include Corsi di Laurea Specialistica (CLS) and Corsi di Master Universitario di 1° livello (CMU1). The CLS provide graduates with an advanced level of education to exercise highly qualified activities in specific areas. Access to CLS is through the Italian first degree (Laurea) or an equivalent foreign degree and the course lasts for two years. The final degree, the Laurea Specialistica- LS (second degree) is awarded to graduates who have obtained a total of 300 credits. The writing of an original dissertation is also compulsory. A limited number of CLS regulated by specific EU directives (in Dentistry, Human Medicine, Veterinary Medicine) share the following features: access is through the Italian school leaving certificate or an equivalent foreign qualification, admission is always subject to an entrance examination. CMU1 consist in advanced scientific courses or higher continuing education studies that are open to holders of a Laurea-L or an equivalent foreign degree. Admission may be subject to additional conditions. The length of the course is a minimum of one year. The degree of Master Universitario di 1° livello -MU1 (first level university Master's) is awarded to graduates who have obtained at least 60 credits. The latest legal provisions on university education have changed the name of the Laurea Specialistica into "Laurea Magistrale" (LM), the related programme into "Corsi di Laurea Magistrale" (CLM) and "Corsi di Laurea Magistrale a ciclo unico" (CLMu) in Dentistry, Medicine and Veterinary Medicine.

The third cycle lasting between 1-2 years will earn a student either a Corsi di Dottorato di Ricerca-CDR (doctorate), Corsi di Specializzazione-CS (specialization courses) and Corsi di Master Universitario di 2° livello-CMU2 (second level university Master's degree courses). CDR train

postgraduates for very advanced scientific research or professional appointments at the highest level: they use suitable teaching methodologies such as updated technologies, study periods abroad, internships in specialized research centres. Access is based on an Italian second degree (LS/LM) or a comparable foreign qualification recognized as suitable and admission is subject to the passing of very competitive examinations. The official length of the programme is a minimum of three years. Students must write an original dissertation to be awarded the Dottorato di Ricerca-DR.

CS provide postgraduates with the knowledge and skills required for the practice of highly qualified professions. They may only be established in application of specific Italian laws or EU directives. Access is based on the LS/LM (second degree) or a comparable foreign qualification recognized as suitable. Admission may be subject to additional conditions. Courses last from two to 5/6 years in the health sector.

CMUs consist in advanced scientific courses or higher continuing education courses which are open to holders of an LS/LM or a comparable foreign qualification recognized as suitable. Admission may be subject to additional conditions. Studies last for a minimum of one year. The Master Universitario di 2° livello-MU2 is awarded to postgraduates who have obtained a minimum of 60 credits.

Non - University Higher Education

The non-university level involves programmes of a technical and professional nature. The Formazione Integrata Superiore – FIS aims at a more effective coordination of all professionally-orientated education at higher education level from the 3-year and other more advanced university programmes such as the Corsi di Perfezionamento or Professional Master's to post-secondary regional courses and the IFTS described below. FIS's objective is to re-qualify the entire system of professional education by better exploiting existing resources and facilities and making it easier for students to pass from one educational route to another. Contents must include basic technical and scientific subjects, practical applications, training periods in private concerns or public bodies, other professionally-orientated activities "in the field" and, at intervals, occupational experiences. Practical training periods must cover no less than 30-40 % of the global length of each programme and may take place both in Italy and abroad, in EU or non-EU countries. The final qualification conferred is generally called "Attestato/Certificato di Competenza", the corresponding workload is expressed in credits so as to make the qualification valid for further studies both in Italy - either in the university system or in the 2nd or 3rd level of regional professional education - and abroad, in particular in the European Union.

Regional education and training in other fields (Formazione Professionale regionale-FPR) includes a variety of programmes at post-secondary level (admission by any Italian "Maturità/Diploma di Esame di Stato conclusivo dei corsi di istruzione secondaria superiore" or by an equivalent foreign qualification). The main fields are business, commerce, communication, computer sciences, technical disciplines related to industrial applications, marketing, tourism, etc. It also covers post-secondary programmes in Applied Arts (Design, Graphics), Cinema, Dance, Fashion, Media and Communication, Landscape Architecture, Music, Theatre, etc. All the FPR programmes are offered

by schools/institutes that have been directly established either by the Regions, Provinces, Municipalities or by non-public bodies and have subsequently requested and obtained the legal recognition of all or some of their courses from the relevant offices of the above mentioned local authorities.

Finally it is important to mention Higher Education outside Universities but ranking at University Level. It includes the following institutions and programmes: Academies of Fine Arts, Higher Schools of Design, Music Conservatories and other similar institutes, various National Academies/Schools (for Cinema, Dance, Drama and advanced musical studies) which together constitute the system of advanced education in the arts and music (AFAM); it also includes the Higher Schools for Interpreters and Translators, Higher Institutes/Schools of Psychotherapy, Schools for Archivists and Experts in Palaeography and Diplomacy and also Military Academies.

Italy, in terms of both compulsory and higher education, is currently undergoing a period of transition through which the basic structure of the state system, as a whole, is being overhauled. These changes are designed not only to bring Italian education in line with the rest of the European Union but also create a more flexible system, which better and more broadly educates those choosing to study in Italy.