

# **THE ATTRACTIVENESS OF FRENCH HIGHER EDUCATION**

## **1/ An education system extremely open to foreign students**

Student mobility, in stocks and flows, has been facilitated and encouraged by the large number of partnerships developed by French universities and *grandes écoles* (top graduate schools) with foreign universities. Some **62,000 French students** study abroad and **265,000 foreign students (10% of student numbers)** came to France to study in 2006. This makes France the **number three country for students** alongside Germany and after the United States and the United Kingdom.

France assists foreign students who wish to study in France by means of:

- **82 Edufrance centres working in 50 countries to inform** foreign students by organising and/or taking part in major exhibitions on higher education and education fairs
- **Centres pour les Etudes en France (CEFs – Study in France Centres)**, which individually guide and assist foreign students through their preparations for studying in France. Foreign students are now helped each step of the way (see Appendix 1). Six centres have been up and running in **China, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Senegal and Vietnam** since 2005. Four new CEFs opened their doors in **Mexico, South Korea, Cameroon and Turkey** in spring 2006. **Ten more will be set up by the end of December 2006.**

**A quality charter** guarantees the quality of the hosting system set up for foreign students granted French government scholarships and grants. These students receive support right from their selection in the foreign country through to their return home. The charter was signed by the **French Conference of University Presidents in September 2006.**

## **2/ Quality education**

The French universities and *grandes écoles* are frontrunners in the rankings of the best universities in Europe and/or worldwide published in the specialised foreign press.

- The *Financial Times* of 11 September 2006 placed the top French business schools head of its ranking of 35 best masters in management degrees (with course in English). HEC Paris took first place, followed by ESCP-EAP (3<sup>rd</sup>), the Grenoble Graduate School of Business (4<sup>th</sup>), EM Lyon (5<sup>th</sup>), ESSEC Business School (6<sup>th</sup>), EDHEC Business School (7<sup>th</sup>) and Audencia (10<sup>th</sup>).

**Eleven of the 35 business schools in the ranking were French and seven were in the top ten.**

- The *Times Higher Education Supplement* ranking of 28 October 2005 emphasised the quality of education at the *Ecole Polytechnique* (the most prestigious engineering school in France), the *Ecole Normale Supérieure* (leading French institute for literature and philosophy) and the Institute of Political Studies.

**The *Ecole Polytechnique* took 3<sup>rd</sup> place among the best European universities, the *Ecole Normale Supérieure* was placed in 7<sup>th</sup> place and the Institute of Political Studies was ranked 21<sup>st</sup>.**

- A European Commission study (*Third European Report on S&T Indicators*, 2003) ranked the **University of Paris VI** number two in Europe for scientific publications (22,154), behind the University of London. In 2006, the University of Shanghai placed the University of Paris VI in **7<sup>th</sup> place** of the best European universities.

### **3/ Qualifications issued to foreign students in France are recognised Europe-wide**

In keeping with the Sorbonne-Bologna process, the French universities have all now adopted the **three European grades**: bachelors, masters and doctorates (BMD).

Moreover, the qualifications issued to foreign students in France are the same as those issued to French students.

### **4/ Education that exports abroad**

- **181 courses can be taken in French** in foreign universities, leading to a joint qualification. Classes are partly or entirely given in French in countries in which French is not the dominant language in the higher education system. This network has been set up by a co-operation charter with the Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (Agency for Higher Education Studies in French), the CGE (Conference of Graduate Schools), and others.
- **Shared-cost French universities have been created abroad (e.g. in Erevan and Cairo)**. These establishments embrace the French university criteria and methods and issue a dual French and local qualification. For example, the French University in Armenia (UFAR) issues French State qualifications (bachelors, masters and soon doctorate) and won first place in the recent René Cassin European Human Rights Competition.
- **French universities and *grandes écoles* have established branches abroad**. For example, the Sorbonne opened a branch in the United Arab Emirates in 2005. A joint subdivision of the four prestigious engineering schools was also set up in 2005 at Beihang University in Beijing. HEC offers numerous masters in business administration in foreign universities. The launch of a new “Executive MBA” was announced in Beijing on 23 June 2006. A number of projects are being set up in the United Arab Emirates, Pakistan, Qatar and China.

### **5/ More accessible studies costing a lot less than the English or American universities**

University enrolment fees are extremely reasonable: enrolment on a bachelors course, for example, costs just **€350** per year and **€400** for a masters. These fees are the same for both French and foreign students (see Appendix 2).

The French government also awards many **scholarships and grants** to foreign students. The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs has set up two excellence scholarship programmes, Eiffel

and Major. More than **20,000 academic scholarships** and training course awards are granted to foreign students and young foreign professionals every year.

French government scholarships and grants cover four elements:

- A **maintenance allowance**, intended to pay for daily living expenses. It can be supplemented with an additional housing allowance.
- A **travelling allowance**, which also includes the cost of the return journey home.
- **Social security coverage** due to scholarship and grant recipients being placed on the student social security scheme if they study in an establishment approved by the general social security scheme and if they are under 28 years old. In all other cases, the student's healthcare expenses can be paid for by student mutual insurance companies.
- **Training course, study course and travelling expenses incurred by the study programme, and printing and documentation expenses.**

French government grant and scholarship recipients are also exempt from university enrolment fees.

## **6/ France attaches a great deal of importance to scientific research**

France is in:

- **4<sup>th</sup> place worldwide** for patents
- **5<sup>th</sup> place worldwide** for scientific publications
- **5<sup>th</sup> place worldwide** for hosting researchers
- **5<sup>th</sup> place worldwide** for R&D

France is a dynamic hub of innovation and research as shown by its many technological breakthroughs (Airbus, the TGV high-speed train, the Ariane rocket and the discovery of HIV, to name but a few), Nobel prize winners (e.g. Yves Chauvin, 2005 Nobel Prize in Chemistry) and Fields Medal winners (Wendelin Werner, 2006).

Moreover, new initiatives such as the **doctoral colleges** have been set up specifically to develop exchanges between French and foreign doctorate students. The first doctoral college was set up with Japan in 2002 and is already operational. The other more recent colleges in China, Chile and Brazil are still receiving applications and will start operations this year.

## **7/ Substantial co-operation between the French universities and the business world**

Work placements are becoming a **compulsory part** of French degree courses in many subject matters in both the universities and *grandes écoles*. Most of the schools ask students to take these compulsory internships during the school holidays or for an entire year called a "professional mobility year" during or at the end of their studies (as a sort of transition between university and the world of work). The foreign students learn a great deal from these work placements, which are highly appreciated in return by the future employers. Successful placements can sometimes lead to a job on leaving university.

In 2006, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs signed an agreement with THALES to host masters students from China and India in France. This agreement is a benchmark of its kind for other companies.

## **8/ Foreign students are entitled to the same benefits as French students**

Foreign students are entitled to:

- Housing benefit
- Social security
- Reduced rates on the cinema, theatre, public transport, university canteen, etc.
- Work in a wage-earning job for up to 60% of standard annual working hours.

## **9/ Speaking French is a rewarding asset**

French holds an important place in the world:

- There are 181 million French-speakers spread over the five continents
- French is learnt by 82.5 million people
- French is one of the official and working languages of the European Union and virtually all the UN organisations
- France, the number five trade power, is a leading economic partner for many countries, especially in Europe.

## **10/ France is a pleasant place to live**

- France is the **world's leading tourist destination** for its wealth of cultural, geographic and culinary assets
- France has leading-edge infrastructures, especially in terms of transport and healthcare
- The higher education establishments are often an integral part of the towns, right in the heart of a rich cultural and social life: museums, bookshops, cinemas, theatres, libraries, etc.
- France has one of the densest, most varied and dynamic networks of clubs and societies in the world.

## Appendix 1

### THE STUDY IN FRANCE CENTRES

**The Study in France Centres (CEFs) help foreign students at each step of the procedure to organise studies in France:**

#### 1/ When developing the study project

- ✓ The CEF answers all the foreign students' questions, either directly on its premises or by e-mail (all the Edufrance documentation is available).
- ✓ The CEF helps students to develop a relevant study project consistent with their previous studies and to choose a suitable course (individual interviews are compulsory).
- ✓ The CEF also checks the diplomas, certificates and all documents presented by the students and assesses their language level. If necessary, language lessons are proposed.

#### 2/ When enrolling in a French university

- ✓ These centres have a website available so that foreign students can submit their applications online and monitor progress with their processing in real time.
- ✓ Each student therefore has his or her own "Personal Space"

#### 3/ When applying for a visa

- ✓ Registration with a CEF is a compulsory prerequisite for all student visa applications
- ✓ The CEF helps students fill in their visa applications

There are already ten Study in France Centres in China, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Senegal and Vietnam. A further eleven CEFs will be up and running in Colombia, Russia, Madagascar, the United States, Guinea, Gabon, Brazil, Canada, India, Lebanon and Syria by December 2006.

#### **N.B.**

Preliminary statistical analyses show that the creation of a CEF substantially reduces the number of student visa applications. Yet the number of student visas issued has not dropped in the same proportions. In Morocco, it has even risen. This suggests that the creation of the CEFs has dissuaded "false students" while encouraging students with a real study project in France.

VISA COUNTRY	APPLICATIONS			VISAS ISSUED			ACCEPTANCE RATE	
	2004 (before creation of CEFs)	2005 (after creation of CEFs)	Growth in applications	2004	2005	Growth in visas issued	2004	2005
ALGERIA	8449	2795	-43.2%	4843	3392	-30%	57.3%	70.7%
CHINA	7549	7834	3.8%	6247	6592	5.5%	82.8%	84.1%
MOROCCO	8294	7174	-13.5%	4466	4570	2.3%	53.8%	63.7%
SENEGAL	3436	3229	-6%	2043	1816	-11.1%	59.5%	56.2%
TUNISIA	3814	3496	-8.3%	2667	2615	-1.9%	69.9%	74.8%
VIETNAM	1955	1369	-30%	1491	1125	-24.5%	76.3%	82.2%
<b>TOTAL CEF</b>	<b>33497</b>	<b>27897</b>	<b>-16.7%</b>	<b>21757</b>	<b>20111</b>	<b>-7.6%</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>72.1%</b>
<b>TOTAL WORLD</b>	81930	75421	-7.9%	63955	61323	-4.1%	78.1%	81.3%

## Appendix 2

