FEATURE

Alternative admissions routes at the ParisTech schools

CHRISTIAN LERMINIAUX
President of ParisTech

EDITORIAL

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In June 2022, the ParisTech network became a non-profit organisation (association loi 1901). The seven ParisTech schools reaffirmed their desire to continue working together and running joint projects for their engineering students, both in France and abroad. As always, the schools’ actions are underpinned by their shared values: excellence, internationalisation, social diversity, innovation, and solidarity.

The change of status also brings changes to the governance structure, with two major universities (of which some of the ParisTech schools are members) taking on an advisory role: the Université Paris Sciences & Lettres, and the Université Paris-Saclay.

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Can you tell us a little about your background? Why did you choose a ParisTech school for your engineering course?

VA: I did an undergraduate degree in Physics at the Université de Rennes 1. Alongside my degree, I started an engineering master’s programme (CMI) in Physical Instrumentation via the Figure network. I completed the first two years of my studies in Rennes, and the third year as an Erasmus student at the University of Lund in Sweden. By my second year I knew I wanted to apply to the Institut d’Optique, because I was fascinated by the science of light, and it’s a field with a broad range of applications. I’m now a second-year student at the Institut d’Optique, and I’m doing an apprenticeship at CEA Saclay. I want to work as an engineer because my goal is to pursue a scientific career in a stimulating field where project-based work is key, and where I can help tackle societal and environmental issues.

How did you join the Institut d’Optique?

VA: I bought an Onisep magazine, which lists all the engineering schools in France. As I was flicking through, I spotted the name ‘SupOptique’, and had a lightbulb moment – I didn’t realise there was such a thing as an optical engineer! Optics covers all the parts of physics that I love – quantum physics, wave physics, electromagnetism, and so on. I therefore sat the GEI UNIV competitive entrance exam, which gives access to a number of engineering schools, with the aim of getting into the Institut d’Optique. There are two parts. You have to submit an application (cover letter, letters of recommendation, academic transcript), and then sit a written exam and oral exams. Because I was in Sweden on my Erasmus year, I couldn’t take the written exam and was given a special dispensation. I went through that stage and sat the oral exams – a general interview about why I was applying, then one in maths and one in physics. One thing I didn’t know, which might be useful for other candidates applying for parallel admission, is that SupOptique also run an internal competitive exam.

What was it like to join the school, both in terms of your course and student life in general?

VA: Both aspects went very smoothly. I felt at home straight away. Because I’d got through the competitive entrance process, I knew I was good enough, but I was still worried that I might be behind the students who’d done the preparatory classes. Happily, that wasn’t the case at all. There’s a great sense of community at the school – I feel like I’m part of a big family.

More information about parallel admissions at the ParisTech schools (in French).

LAURA TIERLING

European Partnerships Manager at Mines Paris – PSL, and Coordinator of the ATHENS Network

The IDEAL project (European Soft Skills for PhD: enhancing transversal skills through innovative doctoral courses) was set up in 2019 as part of the ATHENS programme and, 36 months later, is now drawing to an end. What were the aims of the project?

Some of the members of the ATHENS network, including four of the ParisTech schools (AgroParisTech, Arts et Métiers, Chimie ParisTech – PSL, and Mines Paris – PSL), got together to think about how to improve, enrich, and promote doctoral programmes internationally, with a view to better equipping young European researchers to address increasingly complex issues, question the relevance of their research activities, and boost the societal and economic impact of their work. One of the major gaps we identified in doctoral programmes was a lack of training in soft skills. The IDEAL project was therefore set up to create a database listing all existing soft skills training at doctoral level, and to design new methods and content.

Was the project a success? What did you achieve?

At the beginning of the project, we ran a survey to ask PhD candidates what they required. We got over 1000 responses! This data helped us tailor our training courses to student demand.

We created a catalogue for PhD candidates, which lists all of the soft skills courses offered by institutions within the consortium. We also designed a MOOC called “Creative and design thinking: process and tools for innovation”, which is open to anyone and can be completed online, and two in-person classes: “Creative and design thinking – Tools and techniques for success” and “Mediating international and scientific communication”. Thirdly, we ran a session on the peer-based “Co-orientation” learning method developed by Isabelle Liotta, professor at Mines Paris – PSL, which aims to help PhD candidates identify their strengths and weaknesses and define their career goals and work out how to achieve them.

Last but not least, we organised an event to present our findings. We had planned a second of these, but had to cancel due to COVID.

Despite having to make some changes due to the COVID pandemic, such as running some classes online, the IDEAL project has definitely been a success. The feedback from PhD candidates has been very positive. They consider soft skills training an essential part of their studies, in particular because it helps them improve how they present research results to non-specialist audiences.

Do you have plans to continue the project?

The “Creative and design thinking: process and tools for innovation” MOOC will remain online, for anyone who is interested. We’re talking to our ATHENS partners about keeping the two courses we developed open to all members of the network. The plan is for the staff who designed the classes to run them at different institutions. For the IDEAL course catalogue, we’re planning to talk to the various European universities involved to see if we can integrate the IDEAL courses in the EELISA catalogue.
COMMUNICATION

From 7–17 October 2022, the ParisTech schools celebrated science in all its forms during the 31st edition of the Fête de la science, a free annual festival organised by the French Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation to encourage more people to explore the world of science. This year’s theme was the topical issue of climate change – a key concern for today’s society and that of the future. The schools opened up their doors to families, school pupils, university students, enthusiasts and amateur scientists, showcasing their research activities through presentations, fun events, guided tours, and exhibitions.

TEACHING

The new term also opens a new year for the RACINE ParisTech network, which provides support and training for academic staff at the ParisTech schools. 2021-2022 was a busy year for the network, marked in particular by the AIPU conference and the publication of an article on a network-based approach to training academic staff. For 2022-2023 the network has put together a training catalogue containing a range of innovative workshops on diverse topics. These include mind mapping, Thiagi games, collective intelligence, inclusion, accessibility, and differentiation. All of the workshops provide a structured context in which academic staff from different engineering programmes across the ParisTech network can come together and share ideas and knowledge.

DIVERSITY

The ParisTech/ENCPB “Ambition Sciences” programme is running for a third consecutive year. Four ParisTech schools (AgroParisTech, Arts et Métiers, Chimie ParisTech – PSL and ESPCI Paris – PSL), the ENCPB, and ten secondary schools are involved. Activities will start in October, after the student volunteers from the engineering schools have received their training. Throughout the year, ENCPB students looking to apply to top schools will benefit from a number of events, including guided tours of the ParisTech schools, the annual ParisTech Cordées de la réussite event, and informal meetings to boost motivation. It looks set to be another exciting year!

INTERNATIONAL

On 28 September, Marie de Boni, Director of ParisTech in Asia, took part in the China workshop organised by Campus France Paris in conjunction with the French Embassy and the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs. She presented the two-way student mobility actions led by ParisTech in China – recruitment of Chinese students looking to study engineering in France, and support for French students interested in studying in China. Her presentation also covered the two long-standing programmes ParisTech runs with the China Scholarship Council. Every year, this organisation finances scholarships that allow Chinese students to obtain a French engineering degree from one of the ParisTech schools (two-year scholarship), or do a PhD at one of the 84 laboratories run by the network’s schools (three-year scholarship). In total, 205 French higher education institutions took part in the online workshop.

INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS

- Renewal of the MoU with the Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST, South Korea)
- Signature of an MoU with the Gwangju Institute of Science and Technology (GIST, South Korea)
- Renewal of the MoU with IIT Guwahati (India)
- Renewal of the MoU with Peking University (China)
- Extension of the Cooperation Agreement with Southeast University (China)

Scholarship programme co-financed by the French Embassy in India and ParisTech (Arts et Métiers, Chimie ParisTech – PSL, the Ecole des Ponts ParisTech, the Institut d’Optique, and Mines Paris – PSL)

International Missions

Recruitment trip to Brazil: 17–24 October 2022
**NEWS FROM THE SCHOOLS**

**AgroParisTech**

**Opening of the new site in Orléans**

On Wednesday 14 September, Laurent Buisson, Director General of AgroParisTech, officially opened the new AgroParisTech site in Orléans. The opening ceremony was attended by Serge Grouard (Mayor of Orléans and President of Orléans Métropole), Florent Montillot (Vice-President of Orléans Métropole, responsible for research, technology transfer, higher education, the Orléans ESAD, and student life), Anne Gaborit (Vice-President of the Conseil départemental du Loiret), and Régine Engström (Prefect for Loiret and the Centre-Val de Loire region). The brand-new building on the Orléans – La Source campus has been made available to AgroParisTech by the city of Orléans and will be used by students on AgroParisTech’s new cosmetology course.

**Chimie ParisTech — PSL**

**Hello to our new international students!**

This academic year, 18 international students from six different countries, including Brazil, Tunisia and Argentina, have joined second year students at Chimie ParisTech – PSL. Current second-year students organised a pre-term induction event on 30 and 31 August to welcome the international students and introduce them to their student buddies. The event was designed with the needs of international students in mind. Daria Moreau, Linguistic & Cultural Education Manager, and representatives from the Office of International Relations, gave the new students a tour of the school and its laboratories and explained how the school is organised.

**Institut d’Optique**

Alain Aspect, Professor at the Institut d’Optique, has been awarded the 2022 Nobel Prize for Physics

The Nobel Prize for Physics is the latest in the impressive string of physics prizes awarded to Professor Aspect: the CNRS Gold Medal in 2005, the Wolf Prize in Physics in 2010, and the Balzan Prize for Quantum Information Processing and Communication, the Niels Bohr Gold Medal, the Albert Einstein Medal, and the Frederic Ives Medal (Optical Society of America) in 2013. Professor Aspect carried out his experimental work as part of the atomic optics group at the Charles Fabry laboratory of the Institut d’Optique Graduate School, focusing on Bell’s inequality tests with entangled photon pairs and, more recently, ultra-cold atoms, quantum gases and quantum simulators. Read more about the research of Alain Aspect and his team here (in French).

**École des Ponts ParisTech**

**Science festival focused on climate change**

Saturday 8 October saw researchers and students from across the school open the doors to the public for a programme of events as part of the national Fête de la science festival. The theme of this year’s festival was climate change and other environmental issues, and the activities on offer included workshops, a photo exhibition, a book corner, demonstrations, a show, a round-table discussion, guided tours and more. For the Ecole des Ponts ParisTech, taking part in the festival is a new way of supporting the local community and reaffirming its commitment to tackling climate change and other challenges in the field of environmental sciences.

**Mines Paris — PSL**

**The time(s) of nuclear disasters**

Franck Guarnieri and Aurélien Portelli, researchers at the Risk and Crisis Research Centre (CRC) of Mines Paris – PSL, have published an article in the Responsabilité & Environnement series of the Annales des Mines review. The article examines how differing conceptions of time have given rise to different interpretations of the Chernobyl and Fukushima nuclear disasters. In the West, Chernobyl and Fukushima have produced imaginary constructions that reflect a linear conception of time. In Japan, interpretations of Fukushima partly reflect this relationship with time, without exhausting the temporal imaginary in which the catastrophe is understood, which allows for the idea of rebirth, thus referring to a cyclical conception of time. Download the article here.

**ParisTech, the major engineering schools network**

The complementary nature of the areas of excellence of the various schools provides our students, researchers and partners (academic and corporate) with an exceptional consortium that offers unique transdisciplinary opportunities. ParisTech also has strong international teaching and research links via its many partnership agreements.

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