

Interactions UTC

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International student mobility: good for France

Hélène Conway-Mouret, minister-delegate for Foreign Affairs, in charge of French abroad, was invited to inaugurate a joint course between UTC and the Lycée Jean d'Alembert in Chile. As she sees it, student mobility is primordial for France's reputation in the world and for the performance expectations for French enterprises in the international scene. An interview with Interactions:

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Regard sur
**la mobilité
internationale**

Interactions: for 14 years, you directed the foreign language department at the Dublin Institute of Technology: what does international student mobility represent for you?

Minister Conway-Mouret (HCR): our younger generations are the most mobile category of our populations. It was for that reason that I decided to organize a Round Table on: "International youth mobility: opportunity or necessity" during the Encounters I also organized April 3 on the thematic "The French abroad, an advantage for the country". It is obvious that young people who go abroad to complete/pursue their studies or enjoy their first professional experience have fully integrate the notion of globalization. They well know that in an international, competitive market-place, it is important for them to have acquired certain personal, human qualities, such as simply being able to master foreign languages, learn to be flexible and open-minded, in a word to be able to adapt to situations as they arise. These 'add-ons' can be acquired abroad, as and when they meet other cultures and values. For the potential employers, expatriation is an advantage inasmuch as it identified those people willing to take risks and adapt themselves.

Interactions: Why do you think these young people could be an advantage for France?

HCR: Even those who go abroad and settle there – or for sentimental reasons – remain closely attached to France. I have never yet met an "expat." who left France because he/she deeply disliked the country; they are our young ambassadors and they contribute to our international image in terms of culture, economy, language, etc., and their higher education skills. When our national companies answer call to tender in foreign countries, the fact that there are French 'expats' there can play in favour of the contract. The Encounters I organized offered an opportunity to make an unusual poll with the question - What do the French think of Expats? to straighten the records. I met literally thousands in two years; I listened to their testimonies, their expectations. This is a little known community as seen from France and they are stigmatized with negative images: when the word expat comes up, the clichés are 'brain-drain', 'tax evasion' ... but in fact the plane truth is quite different: These expat French represents a chance for our national economy. They embody France's qualities, at a time when every effort possible must be mad to create jobs and attract investors in and to France

Interactions: what can be the role of the Universities in this context?

HCR: Each year we welcome 288 000 foreign students in France but we send less than 60 000 French students abroad. We still have a lot to do to increase their presence on the international scene. All our Commercial Colleges propose a year abroad in their curricula, but it is an opportunity that is reserved for an elite group. The Erasmus Plus EC programme should help here, given that the programme in France will be endowed with 4.6 billion € between 2014 and 2020 to enhance international student mobility for scientific, technological and professional streams. The role of the Universities, as I see it, is to set up double degree structures, recognized in France and in the partner countries, to facilitate mobility both ways. I was in Brazil recently where we launched a grant programme called "Sciences sans Frontières" that plan to attract and register 10 000 students exchanges/yr.

Interactions: why do you feel that the inauguration of a joint course agreement between UTC and the Lycée Jean d'Alembert in Chile is important?

HCR: the President and his colleagues at UTC believe in student mobility and encourage these actions. It is a great opportunity for UYTC students who can benefit from a positive, open-minded international policy thrust that accompanies the undergraduates as they explore new horizons. Apart from the traditionally attractive Anglo-Saxon destinations, the emerging countries are becoming increasingly interesting. These countries need skills that they simply do not have locally. The French are generally most welcome, given the high level of their studies in France. Chile is one of these countries. In a word, developing and promoting international student mobility is a development for France's reputation abroad.