



Janvier 2001

The Hotdocs Organization

1 Historical survey

On the 4th December 1994, an electronic discussion group (mailing list) called HOTDOCS saw the light of day. Created by the Collective of Doctoral Students of Toulouse, this list aimed to provide information about problems associated with their training and future career prospects. In the weeks which followed, many exchanges took place, new Internet services appeared, and links were established with other associations of doctoral students, some of which no longer exist, such as *Etudiants et Recherche*. Other topics were discussed: the third (advanced and doctoral) cycle of studies; research and related themes. The listing also put out advertisements for post-doctoral positions and was a forum for in-depth debate concerning doctoral studies, research, research experiences abroad, etc...

In February 1995, the *Guilde des Doctorants* was born. This is an informal network of doctoral students and young researchers in France. They formed a technical work-group, developing information services and discussion infra-structure in order to enable the young researchers community gathered on HOTDOCS to discuss and elaborate new proposals about doctoral training and research.

At the end of February 1995, the general feeling was that beyond establishing contacts and collecting information, concerted actions seemed to be a vital step forward. It was obvious that there was an urgent need to put forward some concerted proposals in response to the problems encountered by the postgrads and researchers who had contacted the electronic discussion groups.

The aim was then to create an authoritative document which would give the low-down on doctoral training and all its potential difficulties. This would then be widely circulated, either via HotDocs via the Virtual Review of Doctoral Students. After this consultation, the agreed report would then be used for lobbying politicians and the media as well as those in the academic world: researchers and lecturers; main research funding bodies; doctoral cycle students.

On the 21st April 1995, after six weeks of intensive work for which doctoral students and young researchers from all disciplines and institutions across France had been mobilized, the HOTDOCS REPORT was published on the Internet. Several hundred copies were sent out: to Government Ministries, to research agencies, to university Vice-Chancellors, to national and international student organisations, research societies, research training supervisors, the

press, trades unions, etc. Freely available on Internet¹, the report was consulted by several hundred people in the first few days of its existence. Since April 1995, the HotDocs report has been sent by surface mail to 350 people, and downloaded from the network by a further 6000.

It has been used in the preparation of documentation for the General Meeting on Universities convened by the Minister of Education in 1996 and 1997. Several press articles focus on the report and its elaboration. In September 1996, *Nature* mentioned the HOTDOCS activity in an article devoted to PhD training problems.

The work of HotDocs continued in two directions:

- Firstly, the group worked to encourage the creation of an organization to represent doctoral and post-doctoral researchers on temporary contracts with research labs or groups, which should take the form of a confederation of associations. This structure was created on the 2nd March 1996, and is called the *Confédération des Etudiants-Chercheurs* (CEC).
- Secondly, the group wanted to create a forum in which the discussions which had led to the report and had been generated by the report could continue, by means of further working parties looking at all aspects of doctoral training. The aim would be to review the contents of their initial report in order to bring it up to date as often as possible. In the same spirit as the CEC, the accent was placed on inciting local associations of doctoral students and researchers on temporary contracts to take part and to share their experiences via the network.

The overall objective is to allow the various associations of doctoral students as well as individuals to share personal and local experiences in research, and to access general information in order to make informed choices and actions concerning the different aspects of doctoral training. The Internet would take a special place in this activity. This became the guiding spirit of the *Guilde* for its continued activity.

2 The *Guilde des Doctorants*: present mission and work

The *Guilde* allows all doctoral students in France to have access via its Web server². The *Guilde* undertakes to be active in the field of doctoral training, Higher Education and research, and to retain an independent stance. We provide **free services** in a sense analogous to free software. All concerned people are invited to join the *Guilde's* teams on a variety of projects. Services provided include:

2.1 Communication tools

2.1.1 Mailing lists

A set of **mailing lists** has been created for postgrads, postdocs and young researchers from France and other countries, via email. They are completely interdisciplinary. Every subscriber can therefore listen to fresh news from all over France on a daily basis. These lists

¹<http://garp.univ-bpclermont.fr/guilde/Rapport-HD/>

A short English version is available. The original document has been written in French and is 145 pages long.

²Hosting institutions of the *Guilde* server are in no way associated with or implicated in the contents of the information presented in its pages.

permit subscribers to work together, discuss issues and find answers to their many questions concerning doctoral training.

Two of these lists provide information for working groups concerned with a variety of themes: the PhD contract³; technological research diplomas; the situation of postdocs; contributions of various categories of staff used for teaching undergraduate classes, etc.

More focused lists have been created : `hd-emploi` is devoted to job announcements and sharing of job hunting experiments, and `hd-expats` is devoted to problems specific to postdocs spending a few years abroad. A particular focus is given to practical problems in application for French academic positions.

Hypertext archives of debates carried out on the mailing lists. Mail archives are classified by subject, date and author.

2.2 Information services

2.2.1 An Internet documentation server on PhD training

Our WEB server provides information on doctoral training, undergraduate ("first cycle") study, shared experiences of the treatment of doctoral students in various institutions, etc. Among them, the famous *HotDocs report* written by the community of postgrads and researchers can be found.

A **PhD's guide** is available on the *Guilde Web* server. Called *le Guide du Doctorant*, it is divided in three volumes named *Before a PhD*, *During a PhD* and *After a PhD*. Several new versions are released each year as people provide new information to the coordinator of the guide. The elaboration process is similar to free software development process: the guide is completely opened to external contributions.

We also provide a list of all French postgrad associations. It is associated with a clickable map. Several French postdoc associations are also recorded in the database.

2.2.2 Scientific information sharing

As Scientific information is the primary resource for all postgrads in the course of their PhD and after, we have decided to provide to the community of young researcher a scientific information sharing tool.

The **Global Science Library (GSL)** is a cooperative search engine for scientific resources on the Internet. Internet resources can be classified along their type (publication server, hardware company, research institute) and field (physics, biology etc). They are loaded in the database by users in a cooperative way. The GSL is presently under development: an alpha version has been made available for testing during summer 2000. The first operational version is expected during year 2001.

2.3 Employment tools

2.3.1 DocNet, a PhDs global database

DocNet is a network of local postgrad database interconnected in a single global network through the Internet. It enables any campus to settle a local database containing various in-

³One of the central proposals contained in the HotDocs report.

formation relevant to PhDs: coordinates, professional skills, description of scientific expertise. These local servers, provided they satisfy minimal quality requirements, can be connected to DocNet.

This global network will enhance the visibility of PhD training among companies and industries. It can also be used for searching scientific experts in a given field. Being used as an address retrieving systems, it will help strengthening the community of young French PhDs.

DocNet is based on well known public Internet protocols. It is a freeware available on the Guilde's WEB server. DocNet distributions already exist for Linux and Windows NT systems including Win2K.

2.3.2 Job databases

An automatic information system on academic positions in France has been settled by the Guilde. Around 1000 position profiles were entered over a total of roughly 3000 (senior and junior level).

Other automatic information systems can also be used for PhD and postdoc announcements. Fusion of these information systems is programmed for the near future.

All these services are offered free of charge and are maintained by volunteer doctoral students and young researchers.