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The Enarques: the dumbest elites in the world?

The title of my seminar presentation comes from an article written by the French Sociologist Michel Crozier. He claims that the education that the French administrative elite receives at the French National Administration School, known as *ENA*, is inadequate to deal effectively with contemporary socio-economic problems in the context of a shrinking state sector, international economic competition and heavy debt. His article is one of many written over the past few months in the context of public frustration with the manner in which the current Government has gone about trying to cut the budget deficit. My aim is to present the different objectives initially assigned to *ENA* upon its establishment in 1945 and to examine Crozier's claim in the context of a more general evaluation of the extent to which *ENA* has fulfilled these objectives.

I must admit that I am not an expert on the question of elites and therefore I am not capable of providing any profound insights as to the training and capability of French elites in comparison to the elites of other countries. What I can offer is a first hand approach to *ENA* and a summing up of everything I learnt about the school during my sixteen month programme.

Origins

The school was established by a 9 October 1945 ordinance of the French provisional government. It was brain-child of Michel Debré, a close aide of General de Gaulle, and a future Prime Minister, who has since outlined five reasons for its creation.

First, the existing bureaucratic elite was largely discredited. It was associated with the defeat of 1940 and the Vichy regime.

Second, the school was the fulfilment of a Republican ideal of rationality and meritocracy. The objective was to demonstrate to the French population that any citizen could, on the basis of merit, enter into the upper echelons of the French administration. The administrative elites in what are called the *grands corps* (that is, elite groups within the French administration) had previously been selected by separate competitive examinations for each *corps*, but less meritocratic criteria played an important role in the process and certain families had succeeded in colonising the different *corps*. To take an extreme example, the selection for the diplomatic *corps* included oral examinations for which candidates

were expected to dress in coat and tails, and a cocktail party at which candidates were judged according to their ability to pick up a woman's handkerchief, while holding a flute of champagne in one hand and a cigarette in the other.

Third, *ENA* was established in the context of public expectations with regard to the role of the State in the French economy and the establishment of the Welfare State. The post-war French government needed well-trained, competent officials to manage the new and increasingly complex Welfare State as well as the various banks and companies that were nationalised in the immediate post-war period. Previously, the administrative elite had been trained for the most part at four of the *grandes écoles* (which are elite post-secondary institutions): the *Ecole Normale Supérieure*, the *Ecole Polytechnique*, *Ponts et Chaussées*, the *Ecole des Mines*. The *Ecole Normale* is an institution for the study of the humanities whereas the other three are technical school for engineers. France, therefore, lacked a training institution which focused upon the particular problems of administration and the development of public policy.

Fourth, prior to 1945, each of the five *grands corps* (that is, the diplomatic *corps*, the prefectural *corps*, the financial inspection, the court of auditors and the Council State, which is the highest administrative court in the country) had its own separate recruitment procedures. A student was, therefore, normally encouraged to choose at a very young age a particular stream which would prepare him for the entrance examinations for the *corps* of his choice. This resulted in a structure of rather cloistered administrative elites and a very limited degree of horizontal mobility. One objective in establishing *ENA* was to create a unifying element to this segmented elite, a common educational base, and a sense of camaraderie which would hopefully persist during the career of the *Enarque* in spite of allegiance to the *corps*.

Fifth, the creation of *ENA* should also be seen in the context of General de Gaulle's scepticism with regard to rule by the chattering political classes. De Gaulle believed that in the context of the Parliamentary and party system of the Third Republic, politicians were too preoccupied with party politics to develop policies which best served the interests of the country as a whole. Thus, his belief in the need for a well-trained technocratic elite which would not only direct policy from within the bureaucracy, but also within the support staffs of French ministers (which are called *cabinets*) and even the ministerial cabinet itself.

Today *ENA* is one of half a dozen *grandes écoles* in France. With the exception of *Essec* and *HEC*, two business-oriented schools, the *grandes écoles* are run by the French Government and students become civil servants upon admission and therefore receive salaries. *ENA* is unique in that it is the only school that is also a part of the Prime Minister's office.

Given the important role of the State in post-war French society and the economy, *ENA*, as the established method of selecting the administrative elite, was recognised very quickly as the most prestigious educational institution in the country. The prestige of the school, it is important to point out, had nothing whatsoever to do with the quality of the education that its students received, but rather the quality of the students who succeeded in getting through the gruelling admission examinations, the usually interesting posts in the French administration that graduates could enter, and the very important positions that its alumni began to assume as early as the 1950s. Enarques soon began to enter the top managerial positions in the nationalised banks and industry and some even moved permanently or temporarily into the private sector, a process that has been labelled *pantouflage*, that is the putting on of slippers. By the start of the 1980s, Enarques were to be found in the executive boards of the vast majority of the largest French companies and banks. In the context of privatisation, this spread has diminished somewhat but it nonetheless remains extensive.

In the popular mind, *ENA* is often thought of as a school for politicians. And it is true that many top French politicians were educated at *ENA*, including five of the 1995 presidential candidates, five of the last seven Prime Ministers and two presidents. Moreover, the right of administrators to run for office and the practice of appointing top bureaucrats to ministerial positions does encourage their political engagement more than in other countries.

However, it must be stressed that the vast majority of Enarques never run for public office, do not engage in *pantouflage*, and remain in the bureaucracy all their working lives. The official figure is 64%. But this figure increases to 86% when state owned industries and banks and various public establishments are included. Only just over 4% of the Enarques have held public office and only 2.5% at the national level. While 22% have worked in a public company or bank, only about 14% have entered the private sector at any point in their career, although this percentage is considerably higher in certain *corps* notably the civil and financial administrators.

Who are the Enarques?

Because the school and its students are the subject of so much admiration but also contempt there is a great deal of statistical information about the student body. Since the school was established there have been a total of 5 327 students admitted. The number of students in each class has ranged from a low of 38 in 1947 to 150 in 1982. The number of students was

lowered in 1987 to 80 but this has since crept up to 105 in 1995. At *ENA* there are four kinds of students, the externs, the interns, the so-called third category students as well as the foreign students which I am not going to deal with in this discussion. At the time of their admission the ages of the members of the class of 1995 ranged from 21 to 46.

The **externs** must be under the age of 28 when they take the entrance examination and possess at least one diploma from a post-secondary institution. The average age of admission, between 23 and 24, has remained stable since the creation of the school. The majority of externs have studied at the *Institut des Sciences Politiques*, the Institute of Political Science (better known as *Science Po*) which is considered a mini-*grande école* and a stepping stone on to *ENA*. The youngest externs have studied only three years at *Science Po*. About half have studied elsewhere prior to or after entering the Institut and most have taken a one year *ENA* preparation course at *Science Po* which is also entered via competitive examinations. Students are allowed to take the entrance examinations up to three times. Of the 5 327 students, 3 056 (or 57%) have been externs. The large majority come from Parisian professional or bourgeois families and they tend to fill a disproportionately large share of the top positions in the final ranking at the school: two issues of some controversy which I will deal with in a few minutes.

The **interns** must be under 47 when they take the entrance examination. The average age over the past five years is 33 which is a significant increase from the preceding period when an age limit of 35 was imposed. The interns have to have worked for the State or local government for at least six years. They enter *ENA* either because they want an opportunity to move to a different administration or because they seek more rapid upward mobility in their own administration. The large majority have spent at least one year on a preparation course which is entered via competitive examinations. Interns must be prepared, therefore, to stop working for a period of over three years. However, once in the preparation course, these students are paid a part of their salary. 2 058 of the 5 327 students (or 39%) have been interns. The current policy of the school — which I believe was adopted in the 1990s — is to admit the same number of interns as externs. In 1995, 49 interns were admitted.

Most of the remaining 213 student have been in a special third category which permits men and women under the age of 40 with at least eight years experience in the private sector or as an elected official to enter *ENA*. These students spend at least one year on the *ENA* preparation course organised for the interns. In 1995, 7 third category students were admitted.

The intake of women has fluctuated around 25% over the past decade.

The ENA programme

The entrance examination currently consists of 7 six-hour written exams on subjects such as administrative law, economics, international relations, and 4 oral examinations, including the famous *grand oral* during which a student can be asked a question about any subject which is considered to be in the realm of "general culture". To add to the pleasure of the occasion the oral exams are all public and are usually well-attended.

The *ENA* programme has changed considerably over the last 50 years. It now lasts 27 months. The students spend the first year on two internships (called *stages*), one working in a in a departmental or regional prefecture usually attached directly to the prefect, the other in either a French embassy, a foreign or international bureaucracy, or a French or Foreign firm. The marks that the students receive from these two internships weigh a quarter of the their overall mark. The academic part of the *ENA* programme (which is called the *Scolarité*) begins in January of the second year and lasts a total of 14 months. As of last year, the first seven months are spent at the recently built school in Strasbourg and then, after the August break, seven months in the school in Paris.

The *scolarité* involves two preparation courses without exams, six courses which each end with an examination, three group report projects which are defended orally, first and second foreign language courses which have oral and written examinations, and sport (for which students receive a mark for attendance and effort). The two preparation courses are on financial mathematics and accounting. These lead into a course on public management which lasts six months. The other courses which last three to four months are Local administration, European Community Affairs, International Affairs, Economic policy, Budgetary affairs and the Writing of administrative and legal texts. Each week, for each course, students can write an administrative note on the basis of a dossier dealing with a particular problem. The dossier is a collection of administrative texts, decrees, ordinances, laws, letters, reports and academic articles. The student is expected to place himself in a particular role. For the course on local administration, the student is usually an important official in the Prefecture. For the course on Economic policy, the student is usually a member of the Minister Finance's support staff. The objective is to write an administrative note which explains the contents of the dossier and recommends a particular course of action. The students do not have to write notes for all the dossiers. Few students do so. However, the objective is train oneself for the final examination for each course which consists of reading through a dossier of roughly 100 pages and writing an administrative note in less than six hours. For each of the six courses and the two language courses there are at least two optional practice exams,

which most of the students take. Non-mandatory support courses which fill in the gaps in the student's knowledge on the different subject areas are arranged in co-ordination with the different core courses. The three group projects each last three to four months and deal with social security issues, comparative European administration explored through the management of different environmental problems and defence issues. Each project involves writing a report of about 40,000 words. The report is graded and each student has an oral examination of about 45 minutes during which he can be asked questions on anything written in the report and anything to do with the subject area.

The studies at *ENA* are, therefore, a bit of a marathon and most students find the process emotionally, physically and even perhaps intellectually exhausting. Only the language courses and sports have marks based on participation, so students are obliged to do very little. However, the general environment of competition, one-up-manship, pedantry (the average *Enarque's* more annoying trait) and considerable pressure from one's colleagues in the three group projects, force most students to work a great deal. While Oxford may or may not be an experience, *ENA* is certainly an ordeal. To top things off, students can find out exactly how they are ranked in relation to the other students after each examination, on that particular examination and as a running total. Students can choose not to find out their marks but most of them do so. This process has the rather ominous name of *désoccultation*.

At the end of the *scolarité* students are ranked from 1 to 105. This year there are 106 posts to be filled throughout the administration, which leaves little choice to number 105. The students ranked from 1 to 15 will normally choose positions in the three most prestigious *grands corps*, the Financial Inspection, the Council of State and the Court of Auditors. This is the administrative super-elite, an elite within an elite. Even if the students take little interest in the actual work of these three *grands corps*, they will normally choose to enter them because of their prestige and because members of the *grand corps* have many opportunities to enter into other administrations and industry later in their careers. There are, however, a few exceptions. Martine Aubry, for example, the former minister of employment and the daughter of Jacques Delors, was the *major* in her promotion, that is, she was ranked first in her class. True to her left wing principles, Mme. Aubry entered into the Ministry of Employment, a post which would normally be selected by someone ranked about 60th. However, it must be noted that in spite of her initial refusal, Mme. Aubrey was later admitted into the Council of State. Following the *grand corps*, students choose to become civil and financial administrators ideally choosing posts in the Ministry of Finance and then other kinds of

administrative inspectors. The ranking of students who select posts in the diplomatic and prefectural *corps* and the various ministries varies from year to year depending upon the specific posts available. Posts in the Ministry of Education tend to be towards the bottom of the list.

Has *ENA* fulfilled the missions that were originally assigned to it?

My aim here is to examine Michel Crozier's claim, that the French administrative elite is somehow particularly incapable or incompetent, but I want to place this claim in the context of an evaluation of the extent to which *ENA* has fulfilled the objective assigned to it in 1945.

The school has always had three essential missions. First, to choose the French administrative elite as much as possible on the basis of merit. Second, to widen the access to the administrative elite from the socio-economic groups that had always monopolised the elite. Third, to educate students so that they can become effective and efficient administrators. These three missions are essential to the maintenance of legitimacy in the eyes of the French population: the legitimacy of the school, the administrative elite and more generally the State and the active role that it has played in French society and the economy.

The first and second missions, although seen as complementary by the founders of the school, are of course potentially contradictory. With regard to the first objective, it must be argued that the school has succeeded in selecting an elite on the basis of merit, although it must be noted that the specific criteria which the administration of the school uses to determine merit is the subject of considerable controversy. All students must take the same competitive examinations to enter the school and during the *scolarité*, and the equal treatment of the students during the programme is strictly, some would argue excessively, maintained.

However, concern with regard to the second mission, that is to widen the access to the administrative elite has qualified the application of the principle of merit. While there has never been any established policy of affirmative action to improve the access of any particular group to the school, the creation of the interns in 1946 and more recently the third category — both of which are reserved a set number of places — is, in effect, a kind of affirmative action. The application of the principle of open access on the basis of merit, without any reserved places, would have, logically, led to the equal treatment of all candidates for admission. However, in practice this would have meant that the large majority of places at *ENA* would have been taken by the younger students (the externs) the large majority of whom were, and still are today, children of the economic, administrative or educational elite. Well over 50% of the interns do not come from white collar professional or educational backgrounds. Therefore,

the policy of reserving a set number of places for the interns in effect is a means of ensuring that about a quarter of the overall intake into the school does not come from a white-collar background. Initially this qualification of the principle of merit was limited: prior to 1972 just over a third of the places at *ENA* were reserved for the interns. However, since 1972 the number of reserved places has gradually increased and now equals the number of places available for the externs.

One could argue that those students who were not admitted as externs have the opportunity to enter the administration and then take the entrance examinations in the intern category. Today most of the younger students at *Sciences-Po* who take the entrance exam do so only twice, in order to save their third attempt for when they are eligible to apply as interns after having worked five years in the administration.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the externs, that is the younger students, tend to be in the top half of the class and the interns in the bottom half, even though in every class there are several exceptions. Thus the administrative elite (notably the positions in the *grands corps* and the Ministry of Finance) tends to be dominated by the externs and thus, one could argue, the meritocratic mission prevails, at least in so far as merit is perceived at the school.

It is important to look at the concept of meritocracy and openness in a wider sense. According to a study of the French Ministry of Education, a child whose father was a farmer, worker, artisan or small shopkeeper, had in 1955, 24 times less chance than a child of higher socio-economic categories, to enter the four most prestigious *grandes écoles* (that is the *Ecole Polytechnique*, *ENA*, the *Ecole Normale supérieure*, and *HEC*, the business school). Today, he has 23 times less chance. In the meantime, the chance to enter into University has passed from ten times less chance to four. Even having taken into consideration the expansion of the middle educated classes since 1955, it is clear that the elite institutions remain closed. However, of the *grandes écoles*, it must still be accepted that *ENA* has by far and away the most egalitarian admissions policy.

The third mission is the education of students so that they can become effective and efficient administrators. In theory this mission relates closely to the application of the meritocratic principle: the highest ranked students should be those who become the most effective and efficient administrators. Michel Crozier's claim that French administrative elites are inadequate suggests that these missions are not being fulfilled.

It is, however, impossible to simulate exactly the criteria applied to judge effective and efficient bureaucrats to a school-type situation (and the definition of such criteria is the subject of considerable disagreement). The programme at *ENA*, the internships and the *scolarité*, by stressing certain

skills at the expense of others, instructs students to become a *certain type* of top bureaucrat, and those students who succeed tend to best fit the mould.

On the basis of the *scolarité* and the internships, I can more or less construct the *ENA* model of a top bureaucrat. First, he or she is someone who can with great speed read through hundreds of pages, select the most important elements and organise them in such a way as to present a convincing solution to a particular problem. This is the skill upon which about half of the overall *ENA* mark is based. Second, he or she is someone who can memorise lots of facts, however irrelevant they might be to public administration, and be able to present them logically in whatever context. Third, he or she is someone who can weigh up all the competing factors at play with regard to a particular problem and come up with an unexciting and unimaginative solution which is likely to offend the smallest number of people although not hit the problem squarely on its head. Fourth, he or she is very wary of criticising the existing operation of the state. Having read numerous internship reports, I can say that the State is rarely criticised although local government is often ravaged with considerable energy. Fifth, he or she is very hardworking and competitive — although on average demonstrates a very limited capacity to work effectively in groups and virtually no leadership skills.

Several of these traits, particularly diligence and quick and incisive thinking are clearly admirable qualities. Many of the Enarques will spend most their careers writing administrative notes, so the training at *ENA* is particularly useful. The tendency to toe the line, however, is a common characteristic of Enarques, although understandable given the considerable social conditioning that takes place during the preparation for *ENA*, the internships and the *scolarité* itself. This is not to argue that all Enarques or all the members of the *grands corps* think alike — there have been Enarques of all political stripes: from Jean-Pierre Chevènement and Michel Rocard to Alain Juppé and Phillipe Séguin. However, it is clear that the large majority of the different case studies treated at *ENA* encourage the adoption of a particular policy which is normally explicitly outlined in the dossier, leaving little room or time for creative thinking. Therefore, despite the different political views of Enarques, the training does tend to foster a particular kind of reaction: that, of course, being a rather intervention one.

However, the principal gap in the training is that the Enarques are not taught how to run an office nor manage their personnel. The courses on public administration deal with accounting and budget control rather than the basic skills of office management. For most of the enarques this is not a serious drawback, given that they will be entering posts in which they manage very few people and will then have to work their own way up to senior managerial positions, hopefully learning the necessary management

skills as they do so. In fact, experience is probably the best way to go about learning how to manage personnel.

However, for the members of the *grands corps*, most of whom are the young externs who have never worked in an office, this gap in administrative training is particularly debilitating. The internship that takes place in the first year of the *ENA* programme rarely provides the opportunity to fill this gap.

After the final ranking at *ENA*, the members of the *grands corps* usually spend around four years training within their *corps*, a few years in a minister's support staff, and then are catapulted into positions of importance either in the bureaucracy, state-owned banks and companies or the private sector. Therefore, most members of the *grands corps* do not have the opportunity to develop effective managerial skills prior to holding senior positions in which they should have already developed these skills.

A general characteristic of the members of the *grands corps* is a certain arrogance of those who know a great deal and work very hard. This arrogance is reinforced by an excessive deference to these Enarques from most of the other bureaucrats, which in turn encourages unilateral action and discourages consultation with subordinates.

One should be careful to avoid generalisation but this nonetheless appears to be a well-established trait. In sum, the problem stems from having a super-elite which is formed essentially according to one criterion alone: the capacity to write a good exam paper. The trials of experience do, of course, have impact upon the careers of the members of the *grands corps*, however, experience is not considered essential to the holding of senior managerial positions.

A final problem with the education at *ENA*, is that the students are trained to deal with all types of issues in a rather superficial kind of way which enables them to talk intelligently on a wide variety of subjects but does not necessarily give them a more profound competence to deal effectively with these problems. For those who spend many years in one administration or company this is not a particular problem, because one learns on the job. However, if one moves about from administration to administration and company to company as many Enarques are apt, they often do not have the opportunity to deepen effectively their understanding of the organisation in which they are located.

Moreover, this has tended to create feelings of resentment on the part of middle-level managers who, although having competently worked in an administration or a company for many years, are unable to advance to certain posts which are reserved for Enarques.

This combination of the superficial nature of the studies at *ENA*, the pedantic arrogance of the Enarques and their lack of good managerial skills, provides some explanation for Crozier's quip. However, it must be said,

that despite their faults, the Enarques are a generally competent, well-informed, and hard-working administrative elite. They are probably no dumber than the administrative elites found in the other advanced industrialised democracies. I think that Crozier's criticism probably has far more to do with the expectations that the French have of their elite and the role of the State, and the inability of this elite to meet these expectations in a changing economic environment.

The claim that Enarques cannot cope adequately with the decreased role of the state in the economy and society, market forces and the wilderness of international capital flows is certainly true. But this is only their fault in that they have failed to explain to everyone that they are incapable of controlling everything. Given the traditional omnipresence of the State in French society and the economy, the popular expectation has inevitably developed that the Enarques control everything and therefore are responsible for everything. The impressive number of Enarques that have become leading political, industrial and banking figures has reinforced this perception. The 30 years of stable post-war economic growth and the expansion of the State sector was associated to a large extent with technocratic power and State leadership. The technocrats are, however, today unable to cope so easily in a very different economic environment of the international market place and capital flows, where their skills and attitudes do not necessarily help them succeed. Enarques are not the equivalent of Wall-street whiz kids. They were never meant to be and they should probably not become so.¹ Given the important role of the State in mismanaging certain industries during the 1970s and 1980s and the failed effort to create international champions, the claim that French elites are the dumbest in the world has a certain legitimacy. However, it seems more as though the Enarques were simply out of their depth in their efforts to manipulate economic developments and the State far too lugubrious a beast to play a competitive role in the international market place.

Crozier's criticism is therefore valid principally in the sense that the Enarques are the dumbest elites in the world because they've been trained to think that they know more than any other elites in the world and the respect for the Enarque is such that they are generally able to get away with

¹Some suggest that the recent decision to increase the emphasis placed upon accounting and managerial strategic planning during the *scolarité* as well as attempts to increase the number of *stages* in public and private companies indicate that the *ENA* administration is placing more emphasis on business-related skills. *ENA* may be trying to imitate business schools in order to strengthen its credibility as a "school for management" — particularly in the context of the increased prestige of French business schools — but there is no indication that there will be a dramatic transformation of the *ENA* programme over the next few years. Furthermore, the number of internships in companies, whether public or private, has actually decreased over the past ten years rather than increased.

thinking this! The recent decision of the Juppé government that will require all *ENA* graduates to spend two years in the provinces is principally a reaction to public opinion that Enarques are not in touch with the realities of the French population. However, the decision will do nothing to change the image of the Enarques because it does nothing to change the underlying expectations placed upon the French state.

Crozier's criticism should also be seen as part of a more general attack against the political establishment in the context of numerous corruption scandals involving Enarques, the disgraceful mismanagement by Enarques of one of France's largest banks, the Credit Lyonnais, and the general situation of lingering high unemployment in the context of record trade surpluses.

By way of conclusion, I would like to address another related question which continually hounded me during my studies at *ENA*. That is: is the school really necessary? After all, the Enarques learn most of what they really need to know about French administrative law, economics and other aspects of public policy prior to entering *ENA*. The studies at *ENA* are really about applying this knowledge in particular situations. Moreover, given the incredible amount of material that the Enarques are expected to read and understand, these studies are inevitably superficial. Enarques receive their real training on the job. Most of what one learns at *ENA* will not be useful to one's career, even though it gives one a better overall understanding of French administration and public policy. Some Enarques claim that they learnt more during their *stage* than at the school itself. However, on the basis of my conversation with students at the school, I have the distinct impression that many of them spent more time trying to find things to do during their *stages* than actually working.

ENA can therefore best be described as an elite ranking machine-come-finishing school.

But why not simply get rid of it and rank students on the basis of the competitive examinations to enter *ENA*?

One could argue that the *stage*, particularly the one spent working with the prefect, is valuable in moulding a top bureaucrat and diversifying experience. However, mobility in the bureaucracy should provide enough diversifying experience. Some point to the camaraderie created at the school which is useful in creating cooperative networks in the administration. This may be true to a certain extent. However, the camaraderie created within the *corps* and through work is probably far more important than that created by *ENA*. Moreover, the viciously competitive and incredibly intense environment at the school seems to lead as much to barely concealed hostility as to camaraderie. More than one Enarque has said to me that they are unable to trust the other students in the *promotion*. In fact, every time I went for dinner or for a drink with more than one French

student, the conversation inevitably turned into a shooting gallery of insults against any student not present.

The principle argument for keeping the school is that it gives the interns and students of the third category, who have previously been working and often have families, the opportunity to compete on a more equal footing with the younger externs, who have previously been studying to enter *ENA*. Moreover, the competitive exams to enter the school are different from the exams taken during the *scolarité*. The exams to enter *ENA* tests one's knowledge of French administration and public policy more generally, whereas the exams during the *scolarité* test one's ability to write a detailed administrative note on the basis of information contained in a dossier dealing with a specific problem of French administration. At *ENA* much of what one has previously learnt is not very useful. In this way, the students are placed on more of a level playing field.

It would be nice to think that this vaguely egalitarian reason justifies the continued existence of this, the most elitist of educational institutions. However, like much else in the French administration, I have the distinct impression that it is probably a useless exercise to look for justifications in face of the weight of tradition.

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