

Training & Employment

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The training and employee trajectory surveys: a new look at in-firm training

The first strand of the French training and employee trajectory surveys (*dispositif d'enquêtes sur les formations et itinéraires des salariés/Defis*), carried out in 2015, provides a more detailed picture of firms' use of continuing vocational training. The data collected on new dimensions, such as the extent of statutory training provision and the use of outside expertise in developing training policies, confirm longstanding findings on the gaps between small and large firms.

firms **OPCA**
CNEPreform
goals **defis**
continuing
training

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Introduced just over 40 years ago, the obligation on employers in France to fund training has helped to make firms not just the main funders but also the location where continuing vocational training is provided and developed. It has also entrenched the view that training provision can be reduced to those measures eligible for funding from the statutory training levy, which has been the basis for most of the statistical data gathered and disseminated to date. One of the main consequences identified by the various studies and reports is the high share of training measures that take the form of classes and courses provided at some remove from the work activity itself.

Inequality of access to training depending on size of firm is another unchanging feature of the French continuing vocational training system. This explains why attempts to facilitate access to training for employees in very small firms and SMEs, and particularly the least skilled among them, frequently appear on the agendas of the social partners and the public authorities. Thus the most recent agreements and legislation have made the so-called OPCAs, the authorised joint collection bodies set up to collect, pool and redistribute employers' training levies, responsible for supporting the management

of such firms in drawing up their training goals and developing their training practices. The latest reform also aims to promote the strategic use of training as an investment in a company's future development and to encourage the development of more varied forms of training.

The Defis surveys (cf. box p.4), initiated by the social partners under the umbrella of the CNEFP and designed by Céreq, constitute an opportunity to inject new life into the approach to in-firm training by widening the scope of the survey questions. The initial analyses presented here help to clarify certain standard findings. They also shed new light on a certain number of questions raised by the most recent legislation on continuing training, which came into force in March 2014. Thus the survey of firms enables us to take stock of the situation prior to the reform, particularly with regard to the use of external agencies such as the OPCAs.

Between obligation and investment: why provide training?

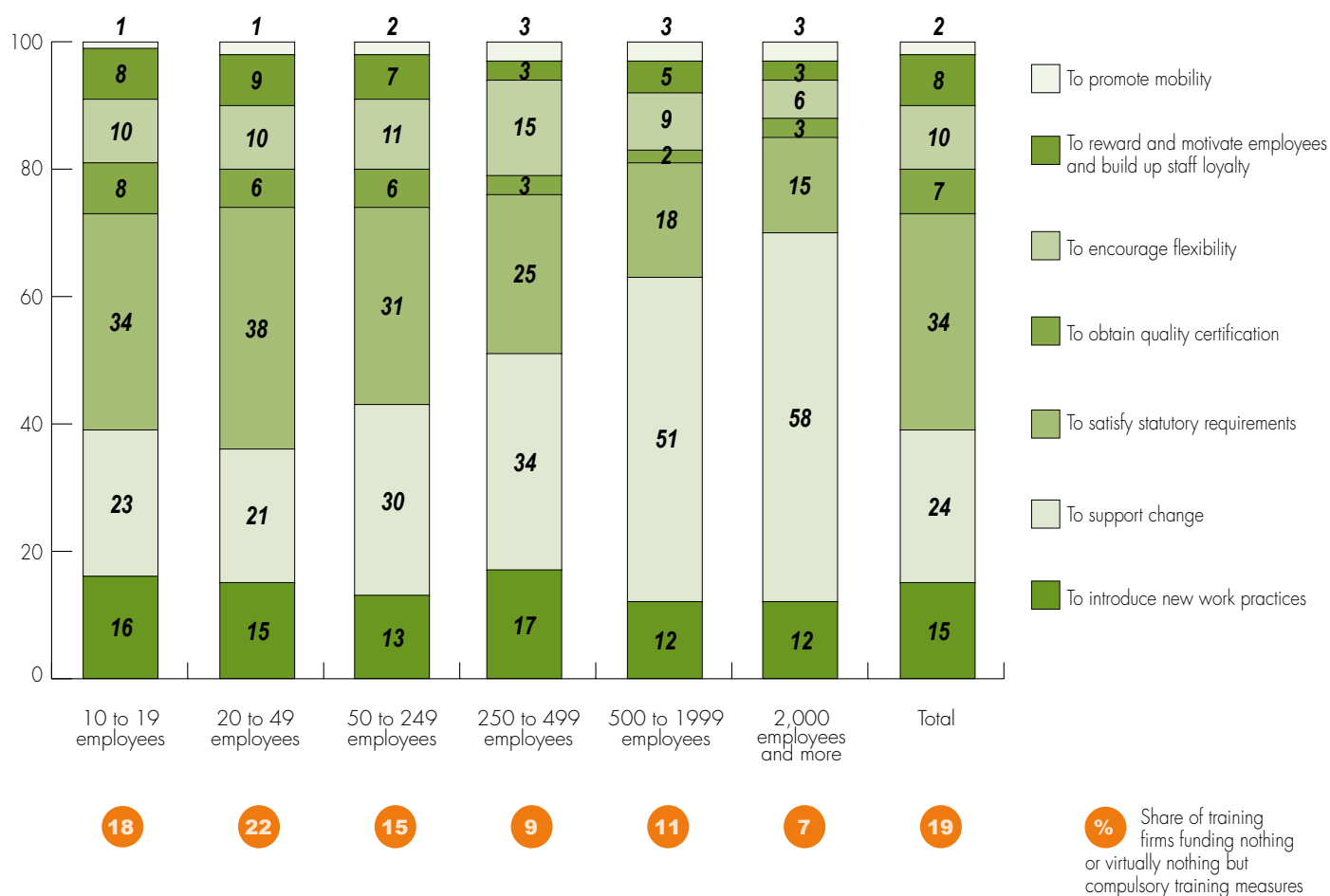
The standard assertion that training provision increases with size of firm is both confirmed and further clarified by the results ●●●

CNEFP

Defis

Initiated by the CNEFP (Conseil National d'Évaluations de la Formation Professionnelle/National Council for the Evaluation of Vocational Training), and financed by the FPSP, the Defis surveys are carried out by Céreq and managed jointly by Céreq and the CNEFP.

Main goal of training measures funded by firms in 2014 by size



Source: Source : CNEFP-Céreq, Defis 'companies' strand, 2015. Field: training firms with 10 or more employees as at 31.12.2014.

**In the transport sector, drivers of goods vehicles have to undergo the compulsory minimum initial training and compulsory continuing training. Both these training programmes are intended to enable them to perform their duties in full compliance with safety regulations and other occupational standards. The compulsory continuing training has to be undertaken every five years.*

from the 'companies' strand of the Defis surveys. In this strand, companies were questioned about all the training provided during 2014, regardless of its form. This widening of the type of training considered does not alter the hierarchy usually observed. All large firms, in contrast to the smallest ones, make use of the full spectrum of training types. For example, the use of training in the work situation is virtually universal in large firms, whereas only half of those with between 10 and 19 employees offered such training.

Data are also collected on the goals being pursued by firms that provide training, which improves understanding of the motivations behind their training effort. More than a third of firms providing training fund it mainly in order to meet statutory requirements. This applies particularly to small firms, with 34% of those with between 10 and 19 employees falling into this category, compared with 15% of those with 2,000 or more employees. In fact, 20% of firms with between 10 and 49 employees provide only compulsory training for their employees, compared with just 7% of firms with 2,000 or more employees. Statutory

training measures also play a central role in certain sectors with high levels of training provision, such as transport*: 95% of firms providing training in this sector put on statutory training programmes and 53% of them do not fund any other training. A similar situation prevails in the extractive, energy, water, waste management and construction industries.

In contrast, the main objective pursued by the majority of firms with 500 or more employees is to support change, of whatever kind (organisational, technological, etc.). This is also the case with firms in the ICT and electrical, electronic and computer equipment manufacturing sectors (52% and 40% respectively).

Firms equipped to varying degrees to develop employee training

Moreover, the Defis 'companies' strand confirms that, regardless of size or sector, those firms that provide the most effective support for their training measures are also those whose employees are most likely to receive training. The extent to which training

practices are organised is captured on the basis of five procedural or strategic criteria, namely the presence in a firm of: a) a department or an employee whose time is wholly or partially dedicated to training, b) channels for diffusing information on training, c) a training plan, d) procedures for identifying training needs and e) methods for analysing skill and competence requirements. Taken together, these five criteria serve as a basis for assessing the level of training organisation.

Here too, compulsory and statutory training measures are an exception: those firms in which such training measures occupy a central position are the ones least well equipped with systems and tools dedicated to training. This applies particularly to small firms, as well as to those in the hotel and restaurant sector and in the construction industry. Thus their use of training as a form of strategic investment (support for the introduction of new tools, moving upmarket, innovations, etc.) would seem to be all the more limited.

The decisive role of dedicated tools in the development of employee training has prompted the social partners and the public authorities to use the reforms to put in place support measures for small firms that do not have access to such tools.

The use of external organisations

While the OPCAs are the favoured partners for supporting firms putting in place a training policy, other organisations are also called on to assist. The kind of support organisation called on depends on the goals that firms are

pursuing through their training provision as well as on the tools available to them internally, their involvement in networks and, of course, their size and sector of activity.

Firms with between 250 and 499 employees and those best equipped to provide training have the highest rates of recourse to external bodies, particularly the OPCAs. On average, forty per cent of firms declared they had called on their OPCA in the past three years; this share falls to 33% for firms with between 10 and 19 employees and rises to 60% for those with between 250 and 499 employees and to 46% for those with 2,000 or more employees. If firms make their own arrangements for a large proportion of the compulsory training measures, they are all the more likely to turn to the OPCAs for assistance. In this case, they probably provide a standardised training programme that meets the statutory requirements.

Recourse to training organisations varies relatively little by size of firm. The smallest ones call on them as much as on the OPCAs, especially when they wish to provide a specific training measure. In turning to the OPCAs, their main objective is to obtain funding in order to provide the training measure in question.

Consultants tend to be called on, regardless of size of firm, when the training measures to be provided are linked to obtaining quality certification. This is also the case when the company director or a member of the HR department is involved in a network or association for entrepreneurs or HR directors. Furthermore, involvement in such networks increases the likelihood of calling on the consular chambers or the industry representatives.

Organisations called on by firms for advice on training policy by size (%)

	An OPCA	A training organisation	Representative of the sector's professional body	An accountant	A consultant	Local consular chamber/ Chamber of Commerce and Industry
10-19 employees	33	34	16	19	10	11
20-49 employees	44	35	16	15	16	8
50-249 employees	53	36	15	6	15	10
250-499 employees	60	39	20	2	16	8
500-1999 employees	51	28	18	2	15	7
2,000 employees and more	46	30	20	1	24	9
Total	40	35	16	16	13	10

Source: CNEFP-Céreq, Defis 'companies' strand, 2015.

Field: firms with 10 or more employees as at 31.12.2014.

Interpretation: 60 % of firms with between 250 and 499 employees sought advice from their OPCA on drawing up a training policy in the course of the previous three years.

The role of accountants in small firms should be highlighted. They work closely with managing directors on administrative and financial matters as well as on issues related to HRM and training. Thus 19% of firms with between 10 and 19 employees say they have called on their accountant in the last three years to obtain advice on their training policy. Since they are not specialists in this area, accountants probably address training issues from a purely administrative and financial perspective.

What do firms expect from the OPCAs?

The survey lists the various services the OPCAs can offer firms, including help in evaluating competences or training needs, submitting proposals for provision of training measures, providing tools for constructing training plans, financial support, advice on financial or legal engineering and supplying information on the sector's training policy and provision.

Expectations are greatest when it comes to finance. After all, firms naturally wish to take advantage of the financial support available from the pooled training levies. They are also keen to obtain advice on how to optimise their training budgets. This concern increases with size of firm. The largest firms, with their own HR departments, have the capacity to enter into client/provider relationships with their OPCA. Their expectations are focused primarily on obtaining additional funding.

Declarations of high expectations, in whatever area, are linked to visits from OPCA advisors. This underlines the importance, for the smallest firms, of the relationships forged with the OPCAs for instigating new behaviours with regard to training. These visits are not anecdotal: 45% of firms with between 10 and 19 employees stated they had received a visit from an OPCA advisor, even though the proportion rises to more than 85% for firms with 250 or more employees.

Presentation of the Defis surveys

The training and employee trajectory surveys (*dispositif d'enquêtes sur les formations et itinéraires des salaires/Defis*) link the training measures undertaken by employees with their occupational trajectories. A panel of 16,000 employees is to be surveyed over a 5-year period (from 2015 to 2019) and the firms that were employing them in December 2013 were surveyed in 2015 in order to gather detailed information on the context in which the employees received (or did not receive) training.

A representative sample of 4,500 firms in the private sector were surveyed in the 'companies' strand of the surveys. In some sectors, firms with between 3 and 9 employees were included in the sample, and all private sectors (excluding agriculture) were covered from a firm size of 10 or more employees upwards.

Only the initial results of the survey of firms with 10 or more employees are presented here.

For further details of the DEFIS surveys:
www.cereq.fr / Access to data / Continuing training surveys

For further details of the companies strand:
Premiers indicateurs Defis - Volet entreprises, J.-M. Dubois, E.Noack, J.-C. Sigot, Net.doc n° 156, avril 2016.

These initial analyses of the Defis 'companies' strand show how diverse firms are in their uses of training, and in particular whether they regard it as a strategic investment for their future development or simply as an obligation. Thus for the smallest firms, and in certain sectors, compulsory and statutory training measures account for the dominant share, if not the totality of training provision. With few tools at their disposal for developing training but making provision, nevertheless, for the measures they are obliged to offer, these firms have already established relationships with their OPCAs. In some cases, these links may eventually help them broaden their horizons significantly with regard to their general training offer.

This variety of attitudes towards training and the practices resulting from them determine to a large extent employees' access to continuing training and their occupational trajectories. By combining the contextual dimension of the firm with the longitudinal dimension of employee trajectories, the Defis surveys will shed new light on the role of continuing training in securing occupational trajectories.

Further reading

Diversité des branches professionnelles en matière de politiques d'emploi et de formation, A. d'Agostino, M.Dif-Pradalier, N. Quintero, Net. doc n°135, avril 2015.

Quand la formation continue - Repères sur les pratiques de formation des employeurs et des salariés, Marion Lambert, Isabelle Marion-Vernoux (coord.), Céreq, 2014.

Les usages et pratiques de la formation dans les entreprises de 10 à 49 salariés et leurs effets sur le développement professionnel des salariés, CNEFP, 2013.

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