

Training & Employment

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Training older workers: a policy in need of updating

Training older workers to keep them in work? The idea is very much in vogue. Nevertheless, concentrating efforts on older workers is not necessarily a panacea. After all, age merely reinforces the strong link between access to training and level of qualification. The less well-qualified workers are, the more important it is to intervene early in order to improve access to training. Age 50, or even 45, has proved to be much too late for many.

Employment
Qualification
survey
transition to work
Longitudinal data
Higher Education

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Of all the measures aimed at making individual career trajectories more secure, training comes high up the list. If its impact is not to remain a pious hope, training has to be made into a genuine tool giving workers access to promotion or retraining or simply enabling them to remain in the labour market. This requires modes of training delivery capable of fulfilling these objectives throughout individuals' working life, particularly for the least well-qualified, who find it more difficult than others to stay in the race. How does age currently affect access to training and the type of training received?

In 2006, 44% of employees received training of some kind. However, this average figure conceals many disparities, including those linked to age: the rate of access to training decreases with age, moving gradually from 51% for the under-30s to 28% for the over-60s (cf. table page 2)

Managers aged 50 receive more training than manual workers aged 30

Generally speaking, the older workers are the less training they receive. This is true, but it does not apply equally across all employee

profiles. While age clearly influences access to training, it is only one aggravating factor in the inequalities that divide employees according to their socio-occupational category.

More than half of managers (*cadres*) aged between 50 and 59 accessed training of some kind in the course of 2006; the figure for manual workers of the same age was 18%. Thus the most striking disparity is linked not so much to age as to socio-occupational category, since managers aged 50 and over receive more training than manual workers under 30. The conclusion already drawn from other surveys is reaffirmed here: it is the most highly qualified workers who have easiest access to training, followed by the youngest workers.

The contrasts are not confined solely to access to training. Thus the number of training courses followed in the course of a year decreases with age and reinforces existing inequalities: 14% of the under-30s attended three or more courses, compared with 10% of the over-50s. Once again, age is merely an aggravating factor in the inequalities linked to socio-occupational category: among the over-50s, 23% of managers attended three or more courses, compared with only 2% of manual workers. The difference exists even in the early

●●● stages of individuals' working lives: among the under-30s, 35% of managers attended three or more training courses, compared with only 5% of manual workers.

The mode of training also differs by age, and this aspect is far from being insignificant. Block-release training, lectures and courses, self-directed learning and work-based training differ in many regards. The conditions under which learning takes place, the degree to which the knowledge acquired is transferable and, above all, the cost are by no means neutral factors. These aspects influence the investment that employees and employers are willing to make in training and impact differently on individual careers.

Lectures and courses are the only form of training whose share gradually increases with age, rising from 67% of all training for the under-30s to 80% for the over-50s. The trend for the other modes of training is in the opposite direction, with the share declining as workers grow older. Block-release training is largely concentrated among the youngest workers, among whom it accounts for 4% of the training received. The proportion of work-based training is higher among the under-40s, among whom it accounts for 20% of all training. Self-directed learning accounts for 10% of training among the under-30s, but for only 4% among the over-60s. For all that, age influences the modes of training differently depending on the employee profile.

Managerial staff are more likely than the other categories, regardless of age, to attend lectures and courses, which account for around 80% of training for this category. The figure is much more variable for the other categories and tends to decline with increasing age. While block-release training is taken up largely by young workers, it is mainly concentrated among young manual workers (11%). Among young managerial staff under 30 years of age, the proportion of block-release training is the same as that for manual workers in their 40s (1%). Work-based training seems to be confined largely to manual workers. Few managers are involved in this form of training

and it is of significance only for those under 30 years of age. Even then, only 14% take part in such training compared with a figure of 27% for manual workers in their 50s.

Objectives that reflect levels of qualification much more than age

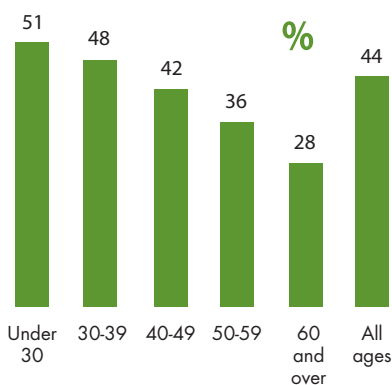
What are the goals of the various forms of training for younger and older workers? Regardless of the age group under consideration, the share of training measures whose aim is to make workers more comfortable or more effective in their work is stable and outnumbers all other objectives. On the other hand, the older workers are the less likely it is that the purpose of training is to facilitate a change of job, with the share declining gradually from 8% for the under-30s to 2% for the over-50s. This trend is hardly surprising, given that many new entrants into the labour market do not immediately find job that satisfies them and therefore seek to improve their employment situation. For others, the early stages of their careers are chaotic, causing them to change jobs frequently before they succeed, in the best of cases, in making their situations relatively stable.

Nevertheless, undertaking training in order to change job remains a goal pursued by some workers even as they grow older. Among the various training measures taken up by 30-39 year olds, one in 20 is intended to facilitate a change of job. Hardly surprisingly, however, the share for the over-50s turns out to be low (2%), since the prospects for a change of career or job decline as one gets older. However, this scarcely unexpected figure does not tell the whole story, and in fact the most instructive element here lies in what separates workers in the same age group.

Once again, socio-occupational category proves to be decisive. The training undertaken by managerial staff is much less likely to be intended to facilitate a change of job than that undertaken by manual and white-collar workers. In 4% of cases, the training undertaken

Access to training declines with age but is determined mainly by level of qualification

Rate of access to training by age...



... and socio-occupational category

	Under 30	30-39	40-49	50-59	60 and over	All ages
Managers	65	63	61	54	40	60
Intermediate occupations	62	60	58	53	41	58
White-collar workers	49	44	33	30	16	38
Manual workers	38	32	26	18	ns	28
All categories	51	48	42	36	28	44

ns: data not significant. Numbers concerned too small to provide reliable figures.

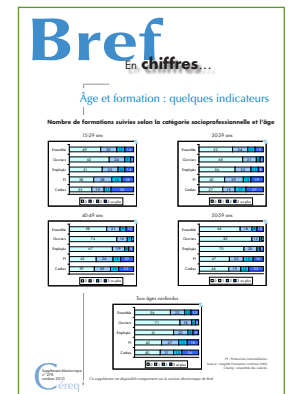
Source: Formation continue 2006, Céreq-INSEE – Field: employees at survey date.

Employee age and training characteristics

		%	Under 30	30-39	40-49	50-59	60 and over	All ages
Number of training measures	0		49	52	58	64	72	56
	1		25	24	21	18	16	22
	2		12	11	9	8	5	10
	3 and over		14	13	12	10	7	12
Type of training	Block-release		4	~0	~0	~0	0	1
	Courses and lectures		67	70	78	80	82	74
	Work-based training		20	21	15	14	14	18
	Self-directed learning		9	8	7	6	4	7
Training goals	To be more at ease in one's work		78	77	78	77	77	77
	Change of job		8	5	4	2	ns	5
	Not job-related		5	7	8	9	ns	7
	Other		9	11	10	12	ns	11

~0: close to zero. ns: data not significant. Numbers concerned too small to provide reliable figures.
Source: Formation continue 2006, Céreq-INSEE – Field: employees at survey date.

Further reading:
<http://www.cereq.fr/pdf/suplement278.pdf>



by manual workers in their 50s is intended to enable them to change jobs, compared with only 1% for their counterparts in the managerial category. For the latter, it is among 40 year olds that this figure reaches its peak of 3%, while it is at its highest for manual workers among 30 year olds, for whom it reaches 10%.

Just as with access to training, the most pronounced differences are those related to socio-occupational category. However, comparison of the training actually undertaken with training preferences by age and socio-occupational category highlights certain discrepancies between reality and aspirations that call the current system into question.

Aspirations vary by age and by level of qualification

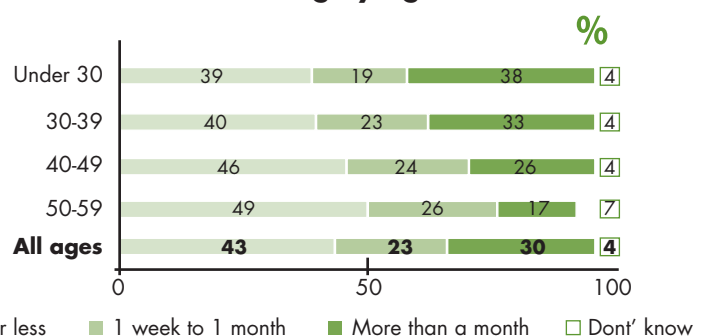
Until they are entering their 40s, a quarter of employees state that their training needs are not being satisfied. The proportion then declines and among 50 year olds it is only 16%. For many of them, it is true, the end of their working lives may seem relatively close, but the reform of the retirement age currently under way could cause them to rethink their career plans.

Furthermore, regardless of age, it is those employees who are both the most highly qualified and have received the most training who are most likely to state that their needs have not been satisfied (27% of managerial staff compared with 16% of manual workers). This is only an apparent paradox. In order to give expression to their training needs, employees have to be in a favourable work environment and hope to derive some benefit from the training they undertake. Be that as it may,

training preferences by age merit investigation by socio-occupational category.

The characteristics of employees' training preferences by age and socio-occupational category reflect the patterns of mobility observed at the various stages of individuals' working lives. In general terms, mobility is high in the early stages of the working life and then decreases with age. Nevertheless, all age groups are affected by labour market segmentation. Stable jobs, the overwhelming majority of which are skilled, are concentrated in the primary segment, while the secondary segment is characterised by precarious jobs requiring few if any qualifications. Consequently, compared with other groups and regardless of age, those with the least qualifications are more likely to want training that will improve their employment situation. Proportionately more manual workers in their 30s state that they would like to change their job. A further indicator reinforces this observation, namely the preferred duration of the training measures that have not been accessed.

Preferred duration of training by age



Source: Formation continue 2006, Céreq-INSEE – Field: employees at survey date.

Overall, the preferred length of training measure declines with age. Of those workers under 30 years of age who declare that their training needs have not been satisfied, four out of every 10 would have liked to participate in a training programme of more than one month's duration, whereas this applies to only 17% of the over-50s. Nevertheless, the share of employees wanting an extended programme of training is much higher among the least well qualified (manual and white-collar workers), regardless of the age group under consideration. What is more, the scale of the differences among younger workers is remarkable: 43% of white-collar workers in their 30s who declare that their training needs have not been satisfied would like to undertake a programme of training of more than one month's duration, compared with only 16% of their counterparts in the managerial category, thereby indicating that they feel vulnerable in their jobs.

Existing provision, desired provision and necessary provision

The decisive criterion in determining access to training is socio-occupational category rather than age, which plays only a secondary role. The same applies to the characteristics of the training undertaken. It is not so much age that determines the objective of the training or even the form of training undertaken but rather socio-occupational category, with age serving merely to reinforce the trends. Consequently, there is every reason to question the relevance of the 'older worker' category when it comes to training. Although in general terms older workers do constitute a separate group in this respect, it is necessary to examine the training undertaken and individual aspirations by levels of qualification. It is well before they reach the age of 50 that the least well qualified state that they would like to enrol in training programmes of significant duration that are likely to improve their employment situation.

Thus it is not simply a question of increasing access to training for older workers. It may also be necessary to consider altering some of its characteristics and, in many cases, to

do so well before age 50. This is a matter of some importance, since the structuring of the supply of training, and the associated costs, would have to be rethought just as much as the numbers to be trained.

Those workers most threatened by changes in the labour market should be able to access training in order to ensure that they can remain in employment. As their aspirations show, this approach calls for training that aims to develop skills and competence by means of longer training programmes. Such an approach was initiated by the 2003 national intersectoral agreement (*accord national interprofessionnel/ANI*), the aim of which was to promote the so-called 'professionalisation periods' scheme (*périodes de professionnalisation*, perhaps better translated as 'career enhancement programmes') that is aimed primarily at workers in mid-career who need to upgrade their skills. The results of this scheme do not seem to match expectations.

Training programmes for the unemployed are significantly longer in duration than those for the employed. Would it not be possible to consider putting in place more substantial training programmes for those in employment, and well before age 50 for the least well qualified, rather than waiting for individuals to become unemployed? In 2003 and again in 2009, during the debates that took place prior to the votes on the 2004 and 2009 Continuing Training Acts, the social partners suggested that a right to 'deferred training' should be introduced for all those who had left school early. Is it time once again to discuss a possible measure that would provide more training during the working life for those who received least in their youth? This of course raises a fundamental question: who would pay the bill? No matter what happens, we need to develop training as a means of keeping workers, particularly older workers, in employment. It is not enough simply to increase rates of access. We also need to rethink the characteristics of the training provided so that the programmes on offer truly meet the demands made of them. ■

Further reading

- *Quand la formation continue*, Céreq, 2009.
- « Les besoins de formation non satisfaits des salariés au prisme des catégories sociales », C. Fournier, *Formation Emploi*, n° 95, 2006.
- La formation continue des salariés du privé à l'épreuve de l'âge, C. Fournier, *Bref*, n° 193, janvier 2003.
- « L'accès des seniors à la formation continue », F. Lainé, *La Documentation française, Retraite et société*, n° 37, 2002.

The 2006 Continuing Training Survey

The 2006 Continuing Training Survey (*Enquête formation continue/FC 2006*), carried out jointly by Céreq and INSEE, is a supplementary survey to the Employment Survey. A sample of 16,500 people under 65 years of age and not in education or training were interviewed face to face between January 2006 and January 2007.

The aim of FC 2006 was to gather information on all the continuing training measures undertaken by individuals, on the context in which training decisions are taken and on the constraints determining participation in training. All training measures were recorded, regardless of purpose (explicitly work-related or personal), duration or form (courses, block-release, work-based or self-directed).

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