

# Training & Employment

## The vocational baccalauréat twenty years later: a success story under the banner of **diversity**

*In just over twenty years, the vocational baccalauréat has gradually become an established part of the range of qualifications available to French youths. However, the modes whereby this diploma has been integrated into the landscape have differed considerably from one occupational sector to another. Those responsible for applying the recent reforms to occupational paths will have to take this diversity into account, since it raises questions about the overall policy of encouraging young people to pursue further studies.*

*To Jean-Louis, who passed away while editing this issue of the Newsletter, a review he created in 1983. This issue is a tribute to his expertise and the exceptional commitment with which he approached his work at Céreq for nearly 40 years.*

The three-year vocational baccalauréat course has been widely introduced in France since autumn 2009 as a means of improving vocational training opportunities. The “bac pro”, as it is called, is now awarded to pupils who have completed the last three years of vocational secondary schooling instead of taking a two-year BEP or CAP course followed by a further two years of study. The reason for shortening the course was to encourage young people to pursue their studies and to reduce the numbers of pupils leaving school with no qualifications. The present review of the “bac pro” during the last twenty years shows the existence of considerable disparities between occupational sectors in terms of how these qualifications have been appropriated. The pattern of diversity observed suggests that the pattern of implementation of the ongoing reforms is far from being the same in all the occupational specialities.

The first specialized vocational baccalauréat courses were introduced in 1986, in line with the proposal made in 1985 by the “Mission for Education and Enterprise” that a new vocational pathway giving wider access to the baccalauréat should be created. This proposal was also consistent with the aim of increasing the national success rate at level IV to 80%, while attempting to make secondary vocational training colleges more attractive. The “bac pro”, which was intended from the start to be a gateway to the labour market, was presented as being a particularly innovative project. In terms of the modes of access involved, it gives holders of BEP and CAP certificates an opportunity of continuing their studies, which was hardly ever possible in the past. Secondly, it is based on a novel pedagogical approach, since on average, these courses include a 16-week period of practical experience at firms, thus providing a new mode of acquiring occupational know-how. The fact that vocational training is organized here on the basis of occupational fields rather than disciplines also makes it easier to link it up with general subjects. The last point worth noting about the “bac pro” is that it makes provision for the knowledge acquired to be systematically assessed using the ongoing method of assessment.

These features seem to have met existing needs because the uptake of the “bac pro” has been increasing steadily, in terms of the numbers of pupils as well as the number of specialities created. If one looks more closely at the various specialities and occupational sectors, however, the picture is much more diverse than the overall figures suggest.

### **A steady pattern of growth masking disparities between specialities**

The “bac pro” did not develop on virgin soil in terms of certification. It was preceded by many specialities in the framework of the technological baccalauréat, the technicians’ certificate (brevet de technicien, BT), and the vocational competence certificate (brevet professionnel, BP). Although the number of level IV qualifications available on the whole is on the decrease, the number of “bac pro” specialities has been increasing steadily since 1986: technological baccalauréats account for a regular proportion of the supply, whereas vocational competence (BP) certificates and technicians’ (BT) certificates, which are ●●●

## Consultative occupational commissions (CPCs)

The CPCs depending on the French Ministry for State Education organize meetings at which employers, employees, the authorities and other qualified persons express opinions about the creation, updating and abolition of technological and vocational qualifications, from CAP to BTS level. Each CPC is responsible for a specific occupational field. Their number decreased from 17 in 2005 to 14 in 2007, when they were reorganized. Several more highly specialized sub-commissions deal with problems relating to qualifications in specific vocational fields. In the CPC responsible for the field of Metallurgy, for example, there are four sub-commissions, one of which deals with occupations in the Automobile industry.

Level V • CAP/BEP  
(vocational competence certificate/vocational studies certificate)

Level IV • baccalauréat level

Level III • baccalauréat + 2 years' further study

Bac pro • baccalauréat professionnel (vocational baccalauréat)

Bac techno • baccalauréat technologique (technological baccalauréat)

BEP • vocational studies certificate

BP • vocational competence certificate

BT • technician's certificate

BTS • higher technician's certificate

CAP • vocational competence certificate  
MC4, 5 • additional awards at levels IV and V

... due to be abolished shortly, are on the decrease. Some highly specialized courses, such as those focusing on artistic occupations and additional awards (mentions complémentaires, MC), also account for an increasing proportion of the supply. A similar pattern of expansion can be observed in terms of the numbers of enrolments. Approximately 60% of all final year level IV pupils not targeting the general baccalauréat are enrolled in technological streams and just over one third, in vocational streams. The numbers targeting vocational qualifications of other kinds account for less than 1%, except for the vocational competence certificate (brevet professionnel), where there has been a slight but steady increase, amounting by now to 7% of the population in question. The "bac pro" has therefore gradually come to be one of the main components of the French level IV technological and vocational training supply.

Although it was officially declared at the start that the number of "bac pro" specialities would be limited, they amounted to 80 in 2007. The idea was for broad qualifications to be designed for families of occupations rather than targeting specific occupations, whereas highly specialized "bac pro" options seem to be developing rather than broad ones. However, no appropriate criteria for making this distinction have ever been clearly defined. Some of the specialities created before 2000 have been revised in order to adapt them to the occupational environment. Other more broad-ranging specialities have been split up and

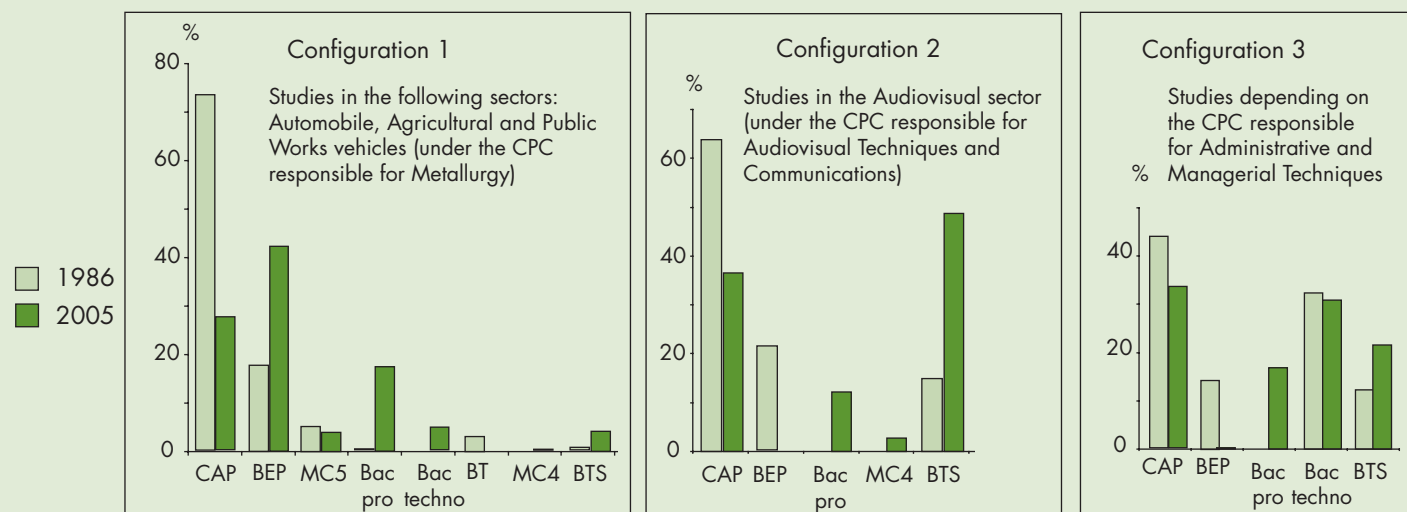
the similarity between functions, products and processes that existed at their creation has been called into question. Other options, on the contrary, have been pooled together. It would be a mistake to attempt to discern a single overall pattern or define a single trend. Many often contradictory processes are at work, in fact, among the various occupational paths and specialities represented.

There exist some striking differences among the "bac pro" options. In the first place, the numbers enrolled differ considerably from one speciality to another. In 2007, the number of final year students ranged from 1 in the case of "Application of materials: option in ceramic-based materials" to 14 389 in that of "Commerce". The pattern of distribution of the examination candidates also showed some conspicuous differences in terms of their status: although apprentices accounted on average for 18% of all final-year pupils, no apprentices at all were enrolled in about ten specialities, whereas all the pupils enrolled in three of the specialities were apprentices. Candidates who had undergone continuing vocational training accounted for approximately 8% overall, but the figures ranged from 0 to 43%, depending on the "bac pro" in question. The mean success rate was 80%, but the figures ranged between 27 and 100%, depending on the speciality. The great variability reflected in these indicators was also observed in terms of the relative uptake of the "bac pro" in each sector in comparison with all technological and vocational qualifications combined.

## Differences in uptake between occupational sectors

The "bac pro" was not greeted with the same enthusiasm in all sectors. The extent to which it has been adopted alongside equivalent pre-existing diplomas and integrated into vocational training paths has varied from one occupational sector to another. Its pattern of development has therefore not been as uniform as some people tend

## Studies pursued (final year pupils) in the various configurations



CPC: Consultative occupational commissions

to imagine – or would like it to be. Six different configurations were defined here (see the inset, and the graphs on pages 2 and 3) to account for the wide variety of contexts in which the “bac pro” has developed. This typology shows which diplomas predominate in each of the occupational arenas defined.

Some sectors were characterized by the strong presence of the CAP before the advent of the “bac pro”. The first “bac pro” courses were introduced at an early stage in these sectors and developed quite smoothly, resulting in an increase in the numbers of BEP holders as the BEP gradually replaced the CAP certificate. In the first configuration, the main path taken by candidates was the BEP, followed by the “bac pro”. The Automobile sub-commission depending on the CPC (see definition on page 2) responsible for the Metallurgical sector, where the first “bac pro” was introduced as early as 1986 with the strong support of the sector’s professionals, provides an excellent example of this trend. Almost three-quarters of the final year pupils that same year were CAP holders, whereas only one pupil out of every five was studying for a BEP. In 2005, candidates for the “bac pro” accounted for 17.5% of this group of pupils, and BEP candidates amounted to almost 42%, whereas the numbers of CAP candidates dropped concomitantly to 27%.

Some sectors had created very few BEPS and focused more strongly on the CAP. The introduction of “bac pro” occurred quite late, giving rise to a rather atypical CAP + “bac pro” vocational training path, corresponding here to the second configuration. The Photography sector, which depends on the CPC responsible for Audiovisual Techniques, is organised around three diplomas: CAP, “bac pro” and BTS. The “bac pro” in Photography, which was created in 1991, was designed as an extension to the CAP course for Photographers, which became the main breeding ground for “bac pro” candidates because it introduced courses on digital technology into its curricula.

## Six configurations

### • Configuration 1 - Development of a prevailing BEP + “bac pro” path

Occupations in Metalworking and the Automobile sector (under the CPC responsible for Metallurgy); the CPC responsible for Transport and Handling; Flexible Materials (under the CPC responsible for the Clothing Trade); Materials (under the CPC responsible for the Chemical Industry); the CPC responsible for Textiles and related industries; Graphic Techniques (under the CPC responsible for Audiovisual Methods and Communications); Services to firms and health establishments (under the CPC responsible for Health and Social Affairs).

### • Configuration 2 – Emergence of a prevailing CAP + “bac pro” path

Audiovisual Techniques (under the CPC responsible for Audiovisual Techniques and Communications); Aviation (under the CPC responsible for Metallurgy); Mining Industries and Construction Materials; Beauty Care (under the CPC responsible for Personal Care); the CPC responsible for the Applied Arts.

### • Configuration 3 – Persistence of the “bac techno” + BTS path

The CPC responsible for Administrative and Managerial Techniques; Water Processing, Biology and Biotechnology, Physical Measurements, Control and Regulation (under the CPC responsible for the Chemical Industry); Electro-technology, Electronics, Automatism, Computer Technology (under the CPC responsible for Metallurgy); the CPC responsible for Marketing Techniques.

### • Configuration 4 – Development of two parallel paths: the CAP + BP and BEP + “bac pro” paths

Hotel and catering work (under the CPC responsible for Tourism, Hotel work and Leisure activities); the CPC responsible for woodworking and by-products; the CPC responsible for Construction and Public Works.

### • Configuration 5 – Very few “bac pros” available

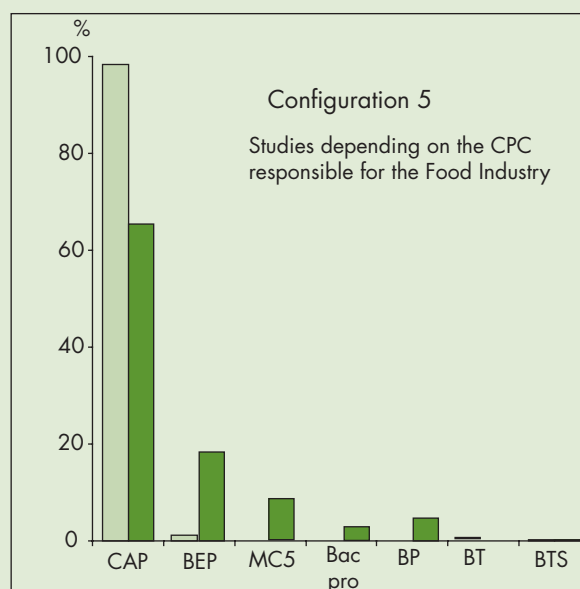
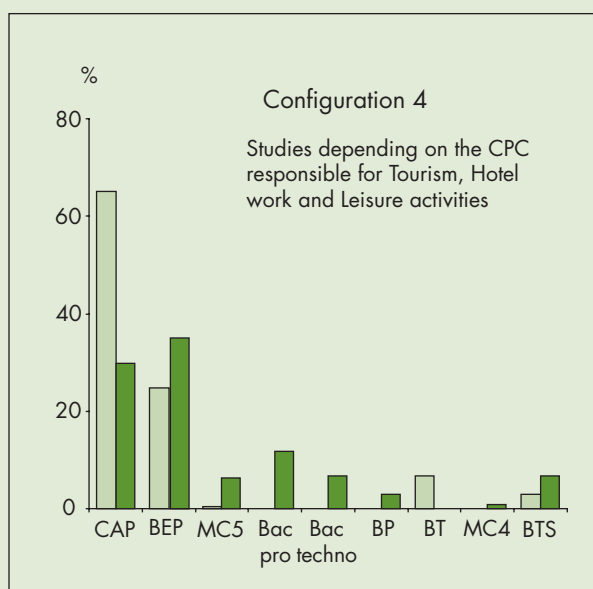
The CPC responsible for the Food Industry

### • Configuration 6 – No “bac pro” created at all

Hairdressing (under the CPC responsible for Personal Care); Banking (under the CPC responsible for Other services); various sectors of the CPC responsible for the Applied Arts.

The technological baccalauréat (known as the “bac techno”) has maintained its supremacy in several sectors: industrial sectors with a strong technological bias and tertiary sectors where the level of qualification required at recruitment has increased, especially as far as “relational skills” are concerned. In all the sectors corresponding to this third configuration, there are fewer newly qualified “bac pro” holders than “bac techno” holders. In the CPC responsible for Administrative and Managerial Techniques, the BEP is mainly a stepping-stone to further studies, and most of its holders go on to sit the “bac pro” and “bac techno”. In the sectors depending on this CPC, the pattern of distribution

*The names of the CPCs used here were based on the 2005 planification.*



Source: Céreq's "Reflète" database.



## Data sources

The data presented here are based on a study conducted by Céreq, which was commissioned by the Direction Générale de l'Enseignement Scolaire (DGESCO) in the framework of a call for tender. The aim of this study was to take stock of the vocational baccalauréat before the 2008 reforms were launched. Trends in the structure and supply of initial vocational courses and qualifications were determined in each of the CPCs, including the flows of pupils enrolling in second year "bac pro" courses and their success rates, the pupils' educational background, and the history of qualifications in the sector. In the second stage, a cross-sectoral data analysis was performed in order to draw up a typology of the "bac pro", depending on how it had developed in the occupational sectors involved.

The following data sources were used for this purpose :

- Céreq's "Reflet" database, which traces the history of French technical and vocational educational qualifications (<http://www.cereq.fr/Reflet.htm>);
- minutes of the various CPC meetings;
- the French State Education Ministry's central database containing information about pupils enrolled at secondary educational establishments;
- national collective agreements.

of the various types of vocational diplomas has changed considerably during the last twenty years: level V qualifications account for a much lower proportion than previously, since they have been easily overtaken by level IV qualifications due to the success of the "bac pro". However, the "bac techno" still accounted in 2005 for two-thirds of newly qualified trainees and the "bac pro" for the remaining third, and the numbers of BTS holders increased practically two-fold.

The three sectors in configuration 4, namely the woodworking, catering and construction sectors, are characterized by the presence of two parallel vocational training paths: the CAP + BP path and the BEP + "bac pro" path. Level V qualifications predominate in these sectors and the CAP, which is based on a strong tradition of occupational identity, also plays a prominent role. The "bac pro", which was adopted quite fast in these sectors, focused mainly on newly developing occupations, such as catering work, where the structure of the diplomas has changed considerably since the 90s. Although most recently qualified youths have reached level V in this sector, it is worth noting that both the relative and absolute numbers of final year "bac pro", BP and BTS pupils have been increasing sharply. The differences between the CAP + BP path and the BEP + "bac pro" training path reflect the differences in modes of job production and distribution existing in this sector: the CAP + BP path corresponds mainly to traditional restaurant work, whereas the BEP + "bac pro" path, which provides more comprehensive training in cooking and other more organizational activities, leads more specifically to jobs at chain restaurants, canteens and brasseries. The CPC responsible for the Food Industry is a special case, which stands alone in configuration 5, since the "bac pro" was only recently introduced in this sector: it was only in 1994 that the project

to create a "bac pro" in the Food Industry was adopted. This cross-sectoral diploma does not meet with the approval of the professionals in this sector, who are strongly attached to the more traditional forms of vocational qualification, in the shape of several specialized BP certificates. In 2005, 92% of final year pupils in this sector were studying for level V qualifications, and the CAP alone accounted for 65% of them. The BEP + "bac pro" path is therefore quite marginal in the framework of this CPC. Three new types of "bac pro" have just replaced the previous single "bac pro" available.

In some sectors of the economy, such as hairdressing, banking and various applied arts, which correspond to configuration 6, there is still no "bac pro". In some cases, the professionals in these sectors favour the vocational competence certificate (BP), and in others, they favour the vocational certificate in artistic occupations.

The existence of these various configurations shows the wide variety of forms in which the vocational baccalauréat has been incorporated into the French qualifications supply. As we have seen, the way they developed has resulted from the importance attached to them by professionals and their willingness to manage these diplomas as part of an overall system of qualification.

The introduction of the "bac pro" reform, which meant that this diploma could be acquired in three years instead of four, has resulted in two enormous organizational changes. access to qualifications has been widened and pupils have been encouraged to pursue their studies. There is nothing new, of course, about the preoccupations underlying these developments: before the first pilot projects were introduced in 2001, demands for means of widening access to initial vocational training and promoting the pursuit of further studies had already been regularly expressed at CPC meetings.

Now the issue of promoting further studies after the "bac pro" might be liable to create some confusion – not to say competition – between the vocational and technological streams if the objectives pursued in both cases tend to overlap. Whatever the case may be, the recent reforms are now being applied and it is too early to be able to predict what effects they are likely to have. It emerges from the present study, however, that each sector has its own needs as far as qualifications are concerned and that all the "bac pro" specialities cannot be approached in the same way. In some sectors, the vocational baccalauréat has developed in a setting which pushes pupils towards level III qualifications because they are held by the professionals to be the minimum educational requirement; whereas in other sectors, levels V and IV are considered to be the most important and relevant on the labour market. Those responsible for the implementation of the reforms should therefore not overlook the fact that the "bac pro" is an extremely multiple entity.

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## Further reading

- "Le baccalauréat professionnel : état des lieux avant la réforme", (The vocational baccalauréat: the situation before the reforms), CPC documents n°4, 2009. Also available at Céreq's Net. doc site <http://www.cereq.fr/pdf/Net-Doc-57.pdf>
- *Les diplômes de l'Éducation nationale dans l'univers des certifications professionnelles. Nouvelles normes et nouveaux enjeux* (Vocational qualifications delivered by the French Ministry of State Education. New standards and new stakes) , F. Maillard and J. Rose, Relief n°20, Céreq, 2007.
- "Certifications professionnelles : les partenaires sociaux impliqués dans la construction de l'offre" (Vocational qualifications: the social partners involved in setting up the supply) , C. Labruyère, Bref n°208, Céreq, June 2004.
- "Le baccalauréat professionnel aura bientôt huit ans" (The vocational baccalauréat will soon be eight years old), B. Bouyx, *Orientation scolaire et professionnelle*, Vol. 22, n°2, June 1993.
- *Niveau IV de formation et accès aux emplois industriels* (Level IV education and access to industrial jobs), Collection des études, n°13, Céreq, 1985.

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