

# Training & Employment

## BECOMING AN UNSKILLED WORKER IN A LARGE ENTERPRISE

### Young People's Choices and Local Contexts

*A major recruitment operation undertaken around the year 2000 by a large automobile manufacturing group in several of its European sites offers the possibility of studying the arrival of young people in unskilled operative posts in different countries. The various national and local contexts in which the recruitments took place played a considerable role in shaping the paths and choices of the young hirees. But beyond this diversity, the recruitments bring out close similarities from one plant and one country to another in terms of the trade-offs the young people wound up making in order to fulfil the objective common to all of them: obtaining a stable job.*

Becoming an unskilled worker is probably not a prospect which young people dream of. For most of those holding such jobs in France, it is more a means of earning a living than a form of professional fulfilment. What are the trade-offs and trajectories which lead young people to enter this kind of job? Do they differ from one country to another? For such questions, the situation offered by the French auto manufacturer PSA offers a remarkable case study. Between 1999 and 2000, this group undertook a large number of recruitments in its plants in France and abroad and hired numerous young people as operatives in similar technical and organisational environments. This operation thus provides an opportunity to compare the entry conditions of young people on four European sites: one in the United Kingdom (Ryton), another in Spain (Vigo) and two in France (Poissy and Mulhouse) (see Box p. 3).

These sites are obviously part of specific national and local contexts--marked notably by the education system, the labour market and job management in the automobile sector—which help to shape the young people's trajectories and choices. One of the main conclusions emerging from on-site observations is the similarity of the young people's trade-offs on the basis of one recurring factor: obtaining a stable job. But if this factor reflects their difficulties in entering the labour market, it should not overshadow the specific conditions of their arrival in the company.

#### Transition paths marked by precariousness

Overall, the young people observed had three kinds of school trajectories: some were early school-leavers (following the end of compulsory schooling); others obtained a diploma following vocational training in a non-industrial field and still others continued their studies beyond the end of compulsory schooling, sometimes at higher-education level, but abandoned them before obtaining the targeted diploma. When they were recruited as operatives, most of these young people already had work experience, often marked by alternating periods of employment and unemployment. A number of them had worked in business, the hotel and catering industry or construction and public works, where they faced working conditions which they considered difficult and badly paid. On all the sites, the proportion of women, which is very low among operatives (around 10%), was on the rise.

- The young people observed on the English site had mainly followed the first of the three trajectories: they entered working life at an early age. In this respect, they were in tune with the larger national situation where, in 2000, two-thirds of British young people between the ages of 16 and 18 were already on the labour market. Similarly, their career path, with its alternating periods of studies and employment, illustrates the experience of most British youth in the labour force. However, nearly all the young people observed on

"For all the young people observed, family and social networks played an important role in gaining access to the company"

the English site who had continued their studies after age 16 had chosen to abandon them. This choice was made in a context where the fact of having a certification seemed to become a negative factor on the labour market, as attested by the difference in unemployment rates among British youth according to their diploma level. The young operatives observed on the Ryton site, and notably those who entered working life very early, had relatively close ties with the industry. Half of them had already worked in this sector, as had their fathers before them. This is a local labour-market effect: the region where the site is situated is in fact still heavily marked by industrial employment, which is declining at national level.

- The young people observed on the Vigo site in Spain had a fairly high training level compared to Spanish youth as a whole, more than half of whom ended their studies with compulsory schooling. A significant proportion of them had a vocational diploma, but in a non-industrial field. Here too, their arrival in operative posts would seem to be explained by the nature of the labour market, where the limited number of local opportunities accentuated the difficulties of labour-market entry for a youth population whose employment rate, at national level, was high, regardless of their training level. The Spanish site is located, moreover, in a region where employment is highly dispersed over a large number of small enterprises and this situation could only increase the attractiveness of a large enterprise with a local monopoly in a sector—the automobile industry—where the proportion of young people is on the rise in Spain.

The cases of the two French sites, Poissy and Mulhouse, shed further light on the respective effects of national and local contexts on the young people's trajectories. Those observed on the Paris site (Poissy) had extremely varied pathways, in terms of training levels and fields alike. Most had a CAP or BEP vocational certificate in a non-industrial field, which they had often obtained through apprenticeship. The others were at *baccalauréat* level or higher. Many had abandoned their studies. They often came from the nearby regions or had just arrived in France. These characteristics reflect both the company's traditional recruitment practices and its non-hegemonic position in the local employment pool.

The young people observed on the Alsatian site (Mulhouse) fell into two distinct categories: those with few or no diplomas who had left the school system very early and those with a CAP or BEP vocational certificate in a non-industrial field who had opted for a new career orientation after an initial experience in the occupation for which they were trained. The employment rate was particularly low in the employment pool at the time the Mulhouse site had an urgent need for

labour. These two categories of young people thus seized the opportunity to enter the company.

## The particular role of networks in access to employment

For all the young people observed, family and social networks played an important role in gaining access to the company. The nature of that role differed from one site to another, however, depending on the degree to which placement procedures were institutionalised in each country and the recruitment practices of each plant.

- On the Spanish site, which recruited on the basis of unsolicited applications, the family played a particularly active role in the hiring process. The fathers, who were very often employed by the company, encouraged their children to apply and even transmitted the applications to management or to their unions. These practices reflect what can be observed at national level, where networks of family and friends are cited as the channels which young Spaniards most often used to find a job.

- More than half the young people observed on the English site had a family member working in the Ryton factory and this is how they learned that the plant was hiring. On the basis of the applications which it received directly, the site's personnel department called on the local job centre to carry out pre-selection tests and hiring interviews. Here too, these are current practices in the UK: not only is recourse to employment intermediaries, both public and private, quite widespread there, but their role very often extends to the selection of candidates.

- On the French sites, the families, in the broad sense, but also friends, transmitted information about hiring possibilities and the nature of the work. However, their role seems less direct than in the English and Spanish cases: the French sites subcontracted the recruitment of operatives to temping agencies with whom they had contracts. The selection process via these agencies was a well-oiled mechanism: unsolicited applications were automatically redirected towards them and candidates could sign up to be sent directly to the auto manufacturer's factory. In this case, such recruitment methods have to do with sector-based practices, for recourse to temping is particularly widespread in France's automobile industry.

## The Rite of Temporary Employment

On all the sites, the young operatives were hired on temporary contracts, with the terms and time periods depending on the different national regulations. These recruitment practices illustrate the spread, in Spain, the UK and France alike, of precarious forms of hiring, to which young people are particularly exposed.

- From this standpoint, the English site offered a distinctive feature worth mentioning: the recruitment of operatives was not limited to young people. This particularity reflects a national context where young people do not constitute a separate category on the labour market and where flexibility in employment involves all age groups. The hiring on the site was based on temporary contracts which were progressively reduced to monthly or even weekly periods. At the end of one year, these contracts could be transformed into “new permanent contracts”, which still did not offer real protection against layoffs during the first two years. The recruits thus had to go through several stages, within an overall logic based more on the seniority they had acquired in the company than on the nature of their contracts. In 2002, obtaining a permanent contract, which the union was demanding, also depended considerably on accepting to work the weekend night shift.

- On the Spanish site, the young workers were hired on fixed-term contracts known as *eventuales* (from the adjective “eventual”). An initial one-year contract was most often renewed two, three or four times following a legal interruption of at least six months between each contract, after which, in some cases, they obtained a permanent contract. Employment stabilisation was highly conditioned by implicit compromises between the families and the personnel department, via the unions. But since the number of requests transmitted by the families was much greater than that of the permanent recruitments fixed by an internal agreement, the young people found themselves in a queue, so to speak, which postponed their access to a stable contract until the age of thirty or so. The prolonged use of temporary contracts is not exclusive to the Vigo site, however; it reflects what is emerging in Spain as a new labour norm for youth employment: among Spanish youth in work, 66 percent of the 15-24 age group and 44 percent of the 25-29 age group have a temporary work contract, compared to 52 and 22 percent, respectively, for French young people.

- On the French sites, unskilled operatives’ posts were filled through temping and essentially involved young people. The total length of the assignment, although it was getting longer, still could not exceed the legal limit of seventeen months. Access to a permanent contract at the end of a temporary assignment—which was thus a *de facto* trial period—did not depend on production needs alone but, as with all the group’s other sites, on the young person’s respect of certain criteria: presence on the job, punctuality, quality of work, availability. It was also tied to decisions made at plant management level, according to rules which seem to be unknown to the workers concerned. Here too,

temporary employment as an inevitable rite of passage reflects a more general trend among French young people: recruitment via temping is certainly limited to certain kinds of work but two-thirds of young people obtain their first job via a temporary contract, regardless of its form.

Ultimately, on all the sites, the young operatives looking for permanent employment first had to follow a certain path within the company itself, without actually knowing whether they would arrive at their goal. This conclusion, based on observations made in 2002, has since led the company to rethink its hiring practices and given rise to suggestions for changing them.

### Individual Trade-Offs: Choices under Constraint

It might seem surprising that young people would seek to obtain an unskilled job on a permanent basis following a more or less lengthy but unavoidable period of precarious employment, especially when they know that the job in question involves assembly-line work which is both physically and mentally tiresome and constraining. Such a choice seems all the more surprising on the part of young people with a qualification or relatively high training level, or who have taken the risk of leaving another job in order to become an operative. This choice resulted in fact from a trade-off which took into account both their previous itinerary and their local employment prospects. Knowing that they had few assets on the labour market,



### The entry of European young people into operative posts with an automobile manufacturer

On the context of its European group works council, the automobile manufacturer PSA invited Céreq to conduct a comparative study of the entry conditions of the young people it recruited massively as operatives in 1999 and 2000. This study had two parts. It was based first of all on country monographs dealing with the general conditions of the young people’s schooling and labour-market entry, their relationship to work and the patterns of entry into adulthood in the three countries concerned. These monographs were complemented by statistical data derived from European Labour Force Survey.

In 2002, surveys were carried out in the form of semi-directive interviews conducted on the basis of a single grid in four of the company’s plants (two in France, one in Spain and one in the UK). These interviews were conducted with management, unions and some twenty young operatives recruited on each site. Overall, the young people interviewed had been working in their respective plants for at least a year and for the most part, with the exception of Spain, had been hired on a permanent basis. They were selected in the production units of the sites’ assembly workshops according to several criteria aimed at reflecting the diversity of the young operatives recruited by PSA.

The analysis presented in this article focuses on the comparison of the features of the young people hired and the determinants of their choices. It does not directly address the other aspects of the study, such as the company’s policy or the young people’s relationship to work and the company. The study was carried out by a team including L. Coutrot, Henri Eckert, Jean-François Lochet, Philippe Méhaut, Martine Möbus and Emmanuel Sulzer (Céreq), Nathalie Besucco (Institut de recherche interdisciplinaire en socioéconomie-Université Paris IX), and Gail Hebson and Nathalie Moncel (European Work and Employment Research Centre-Manchester School of Management).

these young people reasoned on the basis of the perception they had of the advantages offered by the company. In applying to PSA, they were ultimately aiming for a job in a large enterprise and, in the meantime, more room for manoeuvring in the organisation of their lives. They were all looking for stability and what they are actually targeting beyond the job itself was the company's stability. The large number of recruitments made at a given time reinforced the idea that a permanent job was possible. This ambition was directly related to personal plans for settling down: having their own housing, living in a couple, starting a family. Beyond stability, the wage level offered by the company and the regular working hours were two other major factors in their tradeoffs, notably for the young people who had taken the risk of changing jobs.

- On the Spanish site, for young people without a job or at the end of a precarious contract, access to the company represented an opportunity to put a halt to an erratic trajectory or simply obtain a work contract, albeit a temporary one, and thus benefit from social protection. A very high proportion of the young people observed in Vigo were still living with their parents although they were relatively older than those on the other sites—the large majority were over 25. This phenomenon reflects a constant observed at national level: the situation of lasting precariousness relies on family solidarities. Among the young people who had previously been in employment and who, in certain cases, had not obtained their initial qualifications, the prospect of improving their earning levels or working conditions weighed heavily on the decision to enter the company. The appeal of regular working hours was even greater because in Spain the non-respect of regulations in this area leads to employment situations which leave little room for free time.

- On the English site, the prospect of a lasting recruitment emerges first of all as a means of ultimately obtaining the guarantees tied to permanent contracts, notably protection from redundancy. This priority also corresponds to a strong desire for independence, which manifests itself earlier among British youth: while the majority of the operatives observed on the Ryton site were under 25, many of them already had their own living quarters. They nonetheless stressed the issue of obtaining a permanent contract in order to leave their parents' home. They also attributed special importance to the wage level offered by the company. For some of them, this element figured heavily in a short-term trade-off: they preferred to earn their living as early as possible and not continue their studies,

or they had given up a skilled job for an unskilled one which was better paid. For others, notably those who had previously held a stable job, the choice was more strategic, in terms of a bet on long-term security. As with the Spanish site, the image of a prosperous company offering solid guarantees took precedence.

- On the French sites, the temping period gave a particular significance to definitive hiring: the young people perceived this change in status as a major turning point. Beyond this initial objective, the other motivations, common to everyone, depended more on their ages, which covered a broader range—between 20 and 30 years—than on the other sites. This split in function of age was particularly marked on the Alsace site: if the youngest operatives simply seized a job opportunity, the others deliberately made the risky choice of an occupational reorientation with the expectation of better working conditions and pay. Among those under 25, many still lived with their parents and their form of financial independence without leaving the family home was at the opposite extreme from the "student model" which is supposed to be spreading in French society. In this respect, they illustrate the diversity of the forms of transition to adulthood depending on school and work itineraries. Regular working hours and the possibility of having weekends and holidays off were emphasised by the oldest operatives, who expressed the desire to reconcile work and family life.

On all the sites, the young people gave priority to employment stabilisation, in terms of wage level and working conditions. They still had expectations in terms of professional advancement, although they remained realistic about their prospects.

The common features of the young operatives' itineraries on different European sites, as well as the trade-offs they were led to make, bring out the continuity of individual behaviours from one plant and one country to another. Such similarity at once contrasts with and adapts to the diverse forms of recruitment emerging from institutional and local contexts. From this standpoint, the configurations proper to each site may be considered national or local variants of a single process of entering one kind of job—that of unskilled operative in a large industrial concern. It might well be asked whether such similarities are not also observable in the case of other job categories.

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*The country data presented for purposes of comparison were taken from findings produced in 2000 and 2001 by Eurostat, the European Union Statistical Office. In the case of France in particular, the country data are also drawn from Céreq's "Generation '92" and "Generation '94" surveys on the youth transition carried out in 1997 and 2001.*

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# Briefing

## In Focus

### **The integration of young production operators at PSA PEUGEOT CITROËN:**

#### **Social contexts and the effects of sites and occupational identities**

Céreq was asked by the management of PEUGEOT CITROËN to carry out a survey on the integration into work, hopes and expectations of young people entering the organisation.

The cooperative efforts initiated on the occasion of this survey between public and private sectors proved to be effective and definitely worth pursuing. The sociological study conducted by Céreq provided the management of PEUGEOT CITROËN with some particularly useful information. It provided a more detailed understanding of the population concerned, which led to action plans being set up and effective measures being taken which were appreciated by the young employees concerned. In general, the survey enriched the ongoing social dialogue within the Group, and will continue to do so during the years ahead.

Based on the findings of this survey, PSA PEUGEOT CITROËN has taken steps to improve the integration, mobility and motivation of young employees in the organisation. Action plans have been deployed in all the countries where the Group is present.

#### **✓ Promoting the integration of young people into the organisation**

The specific steps taken by the Group within the framework of its commitment to diversity have improved the integration of young workers into the organisation. PSA PEUGEOT CITROËN has undertaken to banish discrimination on the grounds of culture, nationality, sex, religion, political or trade union affiliation, experience, physical characteristics, career history, age, health and sexual orientation from recruitment and professional development matters. Mixing generations, exchanging ideas, and respecting differences enriches the work of all those concerned and promotes the commitment of employees to their teams, their workshops and the organisation.

Among the methods designed to improve young people's integration into the organisation is the Recruitment by Simulation Method (RSM). The aim of this approach, which was set up as part of an agreement with the French National Employment Agency, is to objectively assess candidates' suitability for the jobs available, based on their competences, experience and professional behaviour. Applicants are therefore assessed by testing their aptitudes, and not solely on the basis of their qualifications and experience.

At the start of their careers, young people tend to find themselves more often in temporary work than older employees. The aim of the charter signed on 12 September 2003 with seven temporary employment organisations was therefore to promote the integration of young people into the organisation. This charter, which harmonised the best practices occurring at all the Group's sites, provided temporary workers with comparable conditions of employment to those of the permanent staff, in terms of their salaries, working time, etc. The duration of work placements, periods of vocational training and workplace guidance were also defined more clearly as far as these workers were concerned.

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### ✓ Improving career development

The year 2005 saw the conclusion of an innovative agreement on the development and professional progression of production workers in France, in which the competences used by the workers became the key to career advancement. The aim of this agreement was to adapt management principles to the evolution of industrial processes and structures within organisations, and thus to define more clearly the conditions and criteria on which career advancement depends. It applied to the 21,000 workers in the Group who were recruited in France during the previous 5 years, and responded in particular to the expectations of younger employees. This agreement improves career development prospects by defining the rules clearly and objectively. The competences required at each job level are set out in occupational standards which are validated individually by the supervisors at the workplace.

As shown by the Céreq survey, young employees place great importance on the objectivity of career advancement criteria. In addition to the agreement on the career development of production workers, the wide range of occupations within the Group provides genuine scope for career advancement. Approximately 17% of the staff obtain promotion or improve their level of qualification every year. 30% of the Group's managers have worked their way up via internal promotion. Worldwide, 752 employees, technicians and supervisors were promoted to management status in 2005. This mobility promotes the development of competences and enables employees to progress towards new occupational functions.

In 2005, the job opportunities published via the Department for Human Relations and Resources' intranet were made accessible to all employees in the Group. The publication of information of this kind contributes to giving all employees equality of opportunity as far as mobility and promotion are concerned. On a trial basis, easily consultable Intranet screens have been set up at some of the Group's industrial sites in order to improve access to information for employees who do not have access to a computer at their place of work.

### ✓ Encouraging employees to participate and listening to their needs

With a view to involving employees as much as possible in the work of the organisation, the Group has set up measures to promote participation, which contribute to improving working conditions and the organisation of work in general. All the employees do in fact constitute a potential source of skills, experience, initiatives and innovation.

In order to improve their efficiency, all the Group's industrial sites worldwide are subdivided into Elementary Production Units (EPUs), each of which is staffed by approximately thirty employees operating on a well-structured participative basis in direct contact with the other production departments. This mode of operation, which brings out the employees' potential abilities, enables all employees to understand their own individual impact, the aims of their team, and their contribution towards achieving the organisation's objectives.

To meet the objectives, the various measures taken by the EPUs have taken various forms (individual, collective and cross-sectional work, or proposals submitted as part of the Ideas scheme). In 2005, for example, more than 240,000 suggestions were put forward at the Automobile Division's production sites, more than two thirds of which were adopted. 85% of the workers contributed at least one suggestion.

The management of PSA PEUGEOT CITROËN were particularly interested in the results of the Céreq study on young workers. It enabled the Group, along with the other stakeholders, to define measures specifically targeting this category of employees.

A group such as PSA PEUGEOT CITROËN, which prides itself on anticipating social trends and applying innovative policies, is bound to take an interest in joint projects with public research organisations. Projects of this kind provide means of improving the quality of social dialogue, which is the key to the successful performance of the Group.

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" With a view to involving employees as much as possible in the work of the organisation, the Group has set up measures to promote participation "

The ninth session of the Winter University for vocational training took place in Arles in January 2006 under the aegis of several French organisations working in the field. The theme of this year's meeting was **"Paths of professionalisation, from local to European levels"**. The aim of all the reforms instituted during the last few years has been to provide a wider range of lifelong vocational training paths at local, national and European levels. The efforts made on these lines include the creation of individual rights to vocational training (DIF), professionalizing contracts and training periods, the spread of VAE practices, and the move to introduce a Europass, a booklet which can be used to validate work experience acquired in other countries. The idea is to promote the professionalisation of individuals by providing clearly presented information about vocational training possibilities, specifically targeted and fully operational schemes and modes of vocational training which match people's needs, and proposing easily perceptible objectives in terms of qualifications. Martine Möbus from Céreq et David Mazurelle, the Director of FONGECIF Île-de-France, presented the results of a two-part study on the use of individual vocational training rights (CIF).

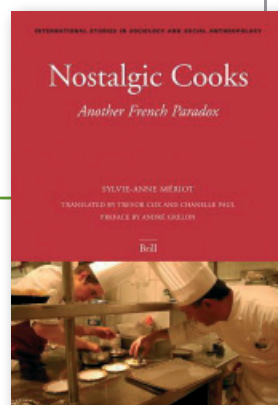
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✓ website of the INFFO Centre:  
[www.centre-inffo.fr](http://www.centre-inffo.fr).

### **Nostalgic Cooks, Another French Paradox.**

> Sylvie-Anne Mériot. Translated by Trevor Cox and Chanelle Paul. Preface by André Grelon. January 2006

Why is it that in France, a country renowned for its gastronomy, chefs tend to develop a nostalgia syndrome? Having been taught how to work in the most prestigious restaurants, they soon discover another reality in everyday restaurants and cafeterias: chefs find it difficult to cope with family constraints and are often forced to accept positions in highly standardized organizations that leave little room for daily inspiration. Although feeling the burden of their professional commitments, these chefs are often assumed by both society and the French educational system to have made an egotistical choice of occupation. The author of this book analyses vocational identities at different levels in French catering services of various kinds and makes international and inter-industry comparisons in the framework of the sociological theme of professional groups.



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## New Publications

### Logiques d'accès à la VAE et parcours de validation

[Logics of access to VAE and validation pathways]

> Françoise Kogut-Kubiak, Christine Morin, Elsa Personnaz, Nathalie Quintero and Fred Séchaud

**RELIEF no. 12**, January 2006

What people go in for the validation of acquired experience (VAE)? What are their expectations and what obstacles do they come across? Which of them succeed and which of them fail in their quest for validation? These were the main questions Céreq was asked to investigate in the framework of a study financed by the European Social Fund. The authors first drew up a typology of access pathways to VAE with a view to detecting the links between candidates' expectations and motivations and their career paths. This typology was then used to identify the stumbling-blocks liable to be encountered on validation pathways, which can cause interruptions, and to determine what resources candidates have to mobilise to achieve their aims. Lastly, recommendations are put forward, based on the main crucial points and success factors identified. This whole analysis contains many personal accounts which illustrate the individual objectives involved, the conditions under which VAE processes take place, the various forms of intervention of the players mobilised and the resources used by candidates taking VAE pathways.

### L'évolution de l'emploi et des qualifications dans la construction aéronautique et spatiale

[Changes in patterns of employment and qualifications in the aeronautic and aerospace industries]

> Benoît Cart, René Eksl, Jean-Marc Grando, Joachim Haas, Françoise Kogut-Kubiak, Philippe Lefebvre, Sabine Mengin, Martine Möbus, Maurice Ourtau, Pascal Roos and Jean-Claude Sardas

**RELIEF no. 13**, January 2006

This issue contains the results of studies carried out in the framework of a prospective study contract (CEP) carried out in the aerospace sector, in which there were seven main objectives, as follows: to identify the economic, industrial, technological, legal and juridical factors on which the evolution of this sector depends; to analyse sub-contracting practices and the modes whereby they are organised; to report on the conditions under which aeronautical maintenance activities are carried out; to examine how R&D departments are going to adapt their methods of organisation to changing industrial demands; to draw a picture of the aerospace sector; to predict qualitative and quantitative employment trends in this sector; and to specify the initial and continuing training needs likely to arise in view of the changes observed. As the authors point out, the activity of this sector has always followed a cyclic pattern, as shown by the statistical records available. Although the events of 11th September 2001 and the war in Irak have aggravated the problems encountered, the way in which the questions now arising about labour management and the quality of the workforce and its renewal are being handled does not seem to be particularly new. The authors discuss these problems in terms of changing staff numbers, age patterns and their management, and the question as to whether vocational training systems meet the needs for competences. Comparisons with the situation observed in this sector in Germany help to show up the French specificities. The second part of this volume contains various contributions on the themes of aeronautical maintenance, sub-contracting practices, competence management at R&D departments, and the aerospace sector. It ends with some predictions about the numbers of staff, types of employment and age patterns, which should help to define the main staff management challenges likely to arise during the years 2010-2015.

■ These publications are available at the Céreq bookstore or by mail order to Marie-Christine Antonucci, Céreq, 10, place de la Joliette, BP 21321, 13567 Marseille cedex 2. Tel. 33 (0)4 91 13 28 89 Fax 33 (0)4 91 13 28 80. E-mail: [antonucci@cereq.fr](mailto:antonucci@cereq.fr). Orders must be accompanied by payment (please include 4 € for postage and handling).

