

The evolution of the training-to-work transition for apprentices in France over the last twenty years



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Initial vocational training for young people in France is structured around two pathways: the school-based pathway, with training provided in vocational high schools, and the apprenticeship pathway, when young people enter into a dual vocational training contract that requires them to spend alternating periods of time in the workplace and in apprentice training centres. For a long time, the apprenticeship pathway attracted only a minority of young people. Over the last thirty years, however, numerous reforms, including the establishment of apprenticeship schemes in higher education, have led to a doubling of the number of apprentices. *Céreq's Génération* surveys enable us to examine these apprentices' training-to-work transition over a 20-year period and to confirm the advantages of apprenticeships depending on the level of training and the economic situation.



APPRENTICESHIP

TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO WORK

GENERATION SURVEYS

NUMBERS

TRAINING LEVEL

Historically, apprenticeships in France fulfilled a particular role, namely to provide training for skilled craft workers, for certain manual workers in manufacturing industry and the construction sector and for employees in small shops and services. Thus they were aimed at young people whose family histories were based on the reproduction of a certain set of skills and on close involvement in certain occupations. It also offered opportunities to other young people, many of them struggling in the traditional education system, for whom an apprenticeship represented a second chance to gain a qualification. This was the approach to apprenticeships that prevailed in the late 1980s and which led young people to work towards a level 3 vocational qualification (CAP/BEP) in these traditional occupations.

Subsequently, the policy of decentralisation, initiated by acts of the French parliament, devolved full responsibility for the organisation and development of apprenticeship policy to the regions, and the so-called Seguin Reform of 1987 opened up initial dual vocational training to all levels of the education system. As a result, the apprenticeship system was gradually transformed and opened up to new social categories. Finally, as part of a policy designed to combat youth unemployment, a voluntarist policy in support of apprenticeships was put in place at both central state and regional level.

Apprenticeships reconstituted: increased numbers and more varied profiles

From the 1990s onwards, as the reforms took effect, the apprenticeship system was transformed. Firstly, the number of apprentices doubled, from 220,000 in 1991-1992 to almost 450,000 in 2018-2019. This increase in numbers was driven mainly by the expansion of apprenticeships into higher education: the number of apprentices in higher education rose by a factor of more than 30 between 1992 and 2010 and by a factor of 60 between 1992 and 2018. As a result, the share of apprentices in higher education in the total number of apprentices rose from 1% in 1992 to 27% in 2010 and then to 40% in 2018 [1] (cf. Figure 1).

This expansion of the apprenticeship system has been accompanied by a diversification of apprentices' socio-cultural profiles [2]. Coming from an increasingly wide range of educational backgrounds, these young people use the apprenticeship system for a wide variety of purposes, reflecting the new forms of dual training programmes that companies have adopted. Some are seeking to acquire specific competences, practical skills gleaned from working and experience of the world of work in order to supplement a generalist, cross-cutting course of training with knowledge obtained in the workplace. Others are seizing opportunities to obtain the funding required to continue their

differences in the indicators for the training-to-work transition between apprentices and their peers who took the school-based route tend to widen, particularly for the lower levels of qualification.

Conversely, in difficult economic circumstances, all these mechanisms go into reverse and disrupt the apprentices' situation at the three key moments of their transition into work. Firstly, they experience greater difficulties in finding a training company [5]. Secondly, on completion of their training, the company is less likely to offer to convert their apprenticeship contract into a "stable" and therefore permanent employment contract; thus between the 2004 and 2010 cohorts, the share of apprenticeships retained by their training company fell for all categories, from 16 to 4% for those with only lower-secondary certificates, from 37 to 12% for those with the CAP-BEP and from 53 to 20% for holders of the *baccalauréat*. Finally, those apprentices not retained by their training company face intensified competition from other jobseekers in their search for a new employer.

For apprentices graduating from higher education, the advantages are primarily qualitative

For apprentices graduating from higher education establishments and entering a labour market less subject to the uncertainties of the economic cycle, the advantage procured by an apprenticeship is of a different kind [6]. It tends rather to improve the quality of the jobs they obtain.

Thus pay progression, as calculated between the wage for the first significant job and that paid for the job held five years after leaving the training system, is greater for former apprentices in higher education; the gap between them and those who took the school-based route widens as the level of training rises.

Finally, an examination of job stability, either on leaving the training system or five years into the working life, shows that the share of stable jobs rises with seniority in the labour market and is correlated with the level of training. The analysis also shows that a higher share of former apprentices leaving with the *baccalauréat* or higher qualifications is employed on open-ended (i.e. permanent) contracts than their peers who took the academic route, another advantage of the apprenticeship route and one that persists over time.

To conclude, several lessons can be drawn from our analysis. While workplace experience acquired

before the end of initial training helps to cut the time taken to find a first job for all young people, apprentices enjoy an additional advantage derived from the effect of "contact" with the company that offered them a training place [7]. Secondly, the advantages of an apprenticeship prove to be procyclical, particularly for apprentices with the lowest levels of qualification. Finally, the advantages of apprenticeships appear to vary depending on the level of qualification. They are reflected in quicker access to employment for the lowest levels, in increased job stability for the intermediate levels and in a wage premium for the highest levels [8].

This assessment of the effects of apprenticeships on the training-to-work transitions takes on a particular significance in this autumn of 2019. On the one hand, the reform of initial vocational training is gradually coming into force and is impacting both the school-based training pathway and the dual vocational training option. On the other hand, the reforms initiated by the Act of 5th September 2018, on the "Freedom to Choose One's Future Career", are profoundly changing the apprenticeship system, as a new training philosophy, new methods of funding and new modes of governance are introduced. In particular, this new organisation is giving firms and their representative institutions a dominant place in the functioning of this "new apprenticeship". —●

→ Further reading

[1] *Repères et références statistiques*, Direction de l'évaluation, de la prospective et de la performance (DEPP), ministère de l'Éducation nationale, 2018.

[2] *Mesure et analyse des discriminations d'accès à l'apprentissage*, rapport d'évaluation Céreq, mission d'animation du Fonds d'Expérimentation pour la Jeunesse, INJEP, ministère de l'Éducation nationale, 2017.

[3] « Insertion professionnelles des apprentis et des lycéens. Comparaison sur le champ des spécialités communes », B. Le Rhun, *Éducation & Formations*, n°94, 2017.

[4] « Quelles sont les causes de la baisse de l'apprentissage dans l'enseignement secondaire », E. Pesonel, P. Zamora, in *Emploi, chômage, revenus du travail*, Insee Références, 2017.

[5] Insertion des apprentis : un avantage à interroger, A. Lopez, E. Sulzer, *Céreq Bref*, n° 346, 2016.

[6] « Comment l'apprentissage favorise-t-il l'insertion professionnelle des CAP-BEP ? », T. Couppié, C. Gasquet, *Formation Emploi* n°142, 2018, p. 35-56.

[7] *Transformer le lycée professionnel : former les talents aux métiers de demain*, ministère de l'Éducation nationale, 2018.

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