

## 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

**H**istorically, 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

## 1 Data and methods used

The Génération surveys provide a basis for examining the education-to-work transitions of young people leaving the education system and for producing various indicators of transition (employment rate, unemployment rate, share of permanent jobs, etc.) depending on level of education, pathway, specialism and so on.

A data harmonisation exercise carried out on the 1992, 1998, 2004 and 2010 Génération surveys provides an opportunity to examine the evolution over a 20-year period of the education-to-work transition during the first five years of the working lives of young people leaving education and training.

Certain methodological choices have to be made in any attempt to assess how apprenticeships in particular affect the training-to-work transition. For each of the levels of training considered, only those specialisms for which a choice can be made between the school-based and apprenticeship pathways are included in the analysis. We also took into account the specific elements that characterise apprenticeship-based training: workplace experience accumulated during training and the building of a relationship with the training firm, giving rise to the possibility of being hired on completion of training. Thus the comparison was carried out for four separate populations:

- young people leaving school-based training programmes having acquired workplace experience during the training period (a regular job, a holiday job or odd jobs) ;
- young people leaving school-based training programmes without any workplace experience during their training;
- young people completing apprenticeships who were hired by the training company at the end of their contracts;
- apprentices not hired by their training company.

education, which enables them to obtain a higher education qualification. Yet others are embarking on a pre-recruitment process that increases the security of the education-to-work transition, both for themselves and for the companies involved.

Alongside these “reconstituted apprenticeships” and the expansion into higher education, the apprenticeship system also continues to provide training opportunities for young people at level 3 (CAP-BEP) in its traditional fields: skilled manual trades in manufacturing and construction, craft occupations, small firms etc. Even though their share has declined (from 90% in 1990 to 50% in

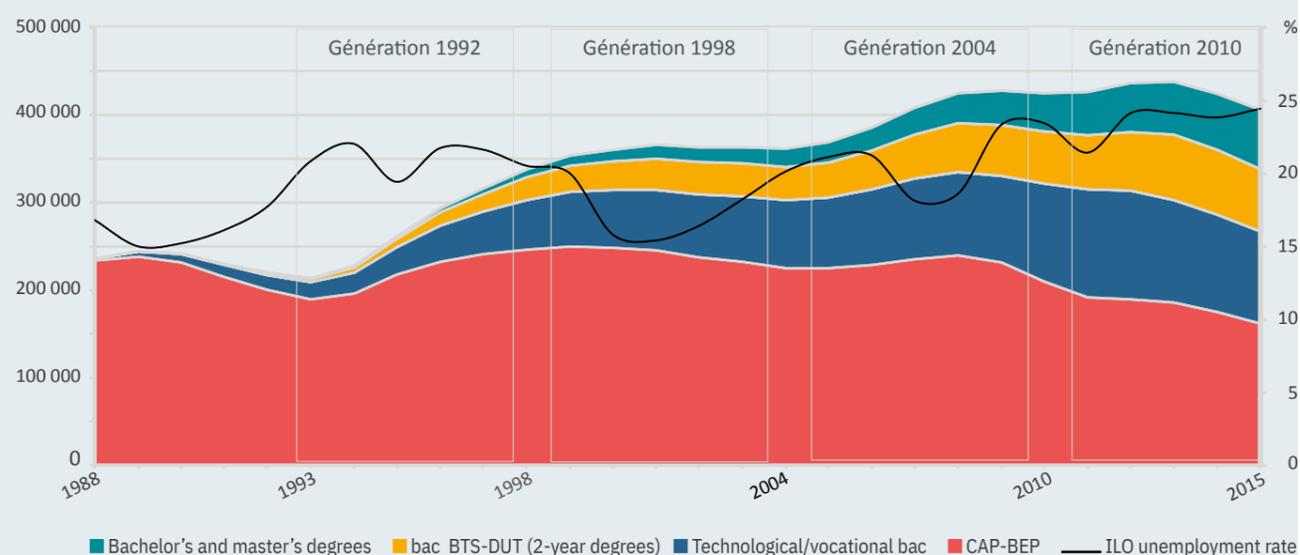
2010 and then 37% in 2018), these young people still form the central core of the apprenticeship system. And while the view of apprenticeships as a form of rehabilitation for those who have struggled in the traditional school system seems out of date, it remains the case that the educational trajectories of apprentices on level 3 or even level 4 (vocational *baccalauréat*) programmes are more discontinuous than those of their counterparts on school-based programmes; they are also less likely to come from first or second-generation immigrant families [3].

However, the various reforms of and changes to the apprenticeship system have not fundamentally altered the place of the dual training system, which retains its position as a complementary pathway to the school-based vocational training pathway. With the exception of the CAP, apprentices are very much in the minority at each level of the education and training system. For example, of every five young people studying for the vocational *baccalauréat*, only one is an apprentice.

### The speed with which the least well-qualified apprentices obtain their first jobs is due primarily to the effect of contact with companies

Céreq’s Génération surveys, which have been carried out since the beginning of the 1990s, provide a tool that is particularly well suited to discussing the supposed beneficial effects of apprenticeship on the training-to-work transition, against this background of permanent change and fluctuating economic circumstances. Thus they provide more specific information on both the cyclical and structural aspects of the benefits of apprenticeships for the training-to-work transition over time, differentiated by level of training.

## 2 Evolution of the numbers of apprentices by level of training and evolution of the youth unemployment rate



Scope: ministère de l'Éducation nationale, Repères et références statistiques, 2019, Employment Survey, ILO unemployment rate.

Work five years after leaving education, the share of Completion of an apprenticeship gives young people two advantages when it comes to finding a job. The first is linked to the workplace experience acquired during training. An inherent element of apprentices' contracts, such experience can also be incorporated into the trajectories of young people on the school-based pathway in the form of holiday jobs or the casual jobs they might do while training. It appears to play a decisive role, since the school-based apprentices who had acquired workplace experience during their training obtained their first significant jobs more quickly than those without such experience (after 8 months compared with 13 for holders of the CAP or BEP, cf. Figure 2).

However, apprentices may enjoy an additional advantage even over their school-based counterparts with workplace experience. This is the “contact” effect, that is to say the opportunity to be hired directly by the company in which they have completed their apprenticeships. Consequently, the time they take to obtain their first significant jobs is automatically reduced compared with their school-based counterparts. For the other apprentices, who do not benefit from this “pre-recruitment” by their training company, the time taken to obtain their first significant job is overall the same as for those school-based trainees who state that they acquired workplace experience during their training.

Furthermore, young people completing apprenticeships enter different labour markets depending on their level of training and do not therefore all enjoy the same advantages, as various findings from Céreq’s Génération surveys show. As far as the time taken to obtain the first significant job is concerned, apprenticeships are most effective for the initial qualification levels (CAP-BEP, *baccalauréat*). In the case of the 2010 cohort, the difference between apprentices and school-based trainees was approximately 4 months for those leaving the system with CAP-BEP, *baccalauréat* qualifications; for those leaving higher education with bachelor’s or master’s degrees and for graduates of the elite engineering and business schools, the difference was just one month. The higher the level of training is, the smaller the differences between apprentices and those leaving from the school-based pathway are. For these more highly qualified apprentices, direct hiring by their training company does not seem to be of such decisive importance for a successful start to their working lives. On the contrary, indeed, leaving the training company on completion of an apprenticeship contract may be an auspicious choice in terms of career plans, development of competences or simply salary prospects.

## A lasting advantage, but one sensitive to the economic situations

The advantage apprentices enjoy when they first enter the labour market persists during the early years of their working lives: five years in, more apprentices have a job than their counterparts with exactly the same level of qualification and specialisation who went down the school-based route.

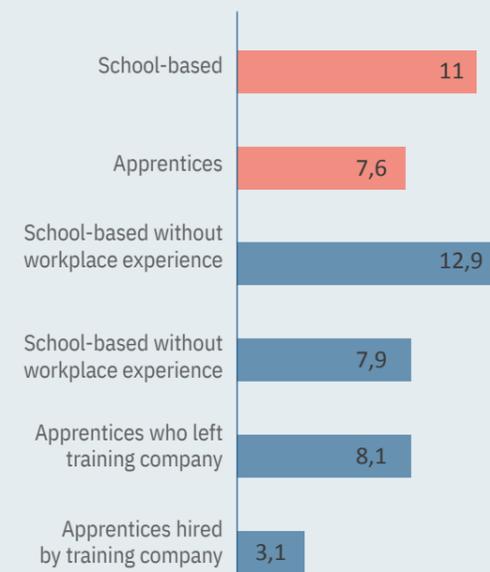
However, the benefits of an apprenticeship prove to be sensitive to the economic situation, as an analysis of labour market entry conditions over time shows. The deterioration in the economic situation endured by the 1992 cohort of leavers and, to an even greater extent, by the 2010 cohort mainly affected the least well qualified leavers, whether they had taken the school-based or apprenticeship route. During these periods, the difference between these two populations in the time taken to find a first job tended to narrow [4]. However, the apprentices seem to benefit more from periods of recovery than their school-based peers (2004 cohort of leavers and even more so the 1998 cohort).

Thus these findings highlight the procyclical nature of apprenticeships. In a favourable economic situation, a virtuous cycle is established, in which the number of jobs supplied by firms – and hence the opportunities for young people to embark on an apprenticeship – increases; the offers of a job on completion of an apprenticeship become more frequent; the competition for jobs among the most highly qualified is less intense. As a result, unemployment rates fall significantly and the

\* **First significant job:** First job obtained after leaving the education system that lasts at least 6 months, regardless of the type of employment contract (fixed-term, open-ended, temporary agency etc.).

\* **SMIC:** the minimum wage that all employees over 18 in France have to be paid. The hourly rate in 2019 is 10.03 EUR gross, which equates to 1,521.22 EUR per month (for a 35-hour week).

## 2 Estimated time taken to obtain first significant job by level of training for those in 2010 cohort leaving with the CAP/BEP (in months)



Scope: Céreq, Génération survey 2010, made comparable with the 1992, 1998 and 2004 Génération surveys. Surveyed after 5 years. A significant job is one that lasts at least 6 months..

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.

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

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[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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