

The observatories become fully operational



Anne DELANOË
Nathalie QUINTERO
Aline VALETTE
-WURSTHEN
(Céreq)

The occupations and skills observatories (OSOs), set up throughout the French economy since 2004, provide technical expertise in support of employment and training policy in the various occupational sectors. Having developed and diversified their work over time, they have firmly established themselves as veritable sources of technical and strategic support. Faced with growing needs to anticipate firms' occupational and skill requirements, the social partners are drawing on their output in all areas of negotiation at industry level. Nevertheless, the current evolution of the institutional landscape is creating tensions around the OSOs' autonomy and positioning.



CPNE - JOINT
COMMITTEE ON
EMPLOYMENT

FORWARD-LOOKING
OF JOB MANAGEMENT

SOCIAL PARTNERS

RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN TRAINING
AND EMPLOYMENT

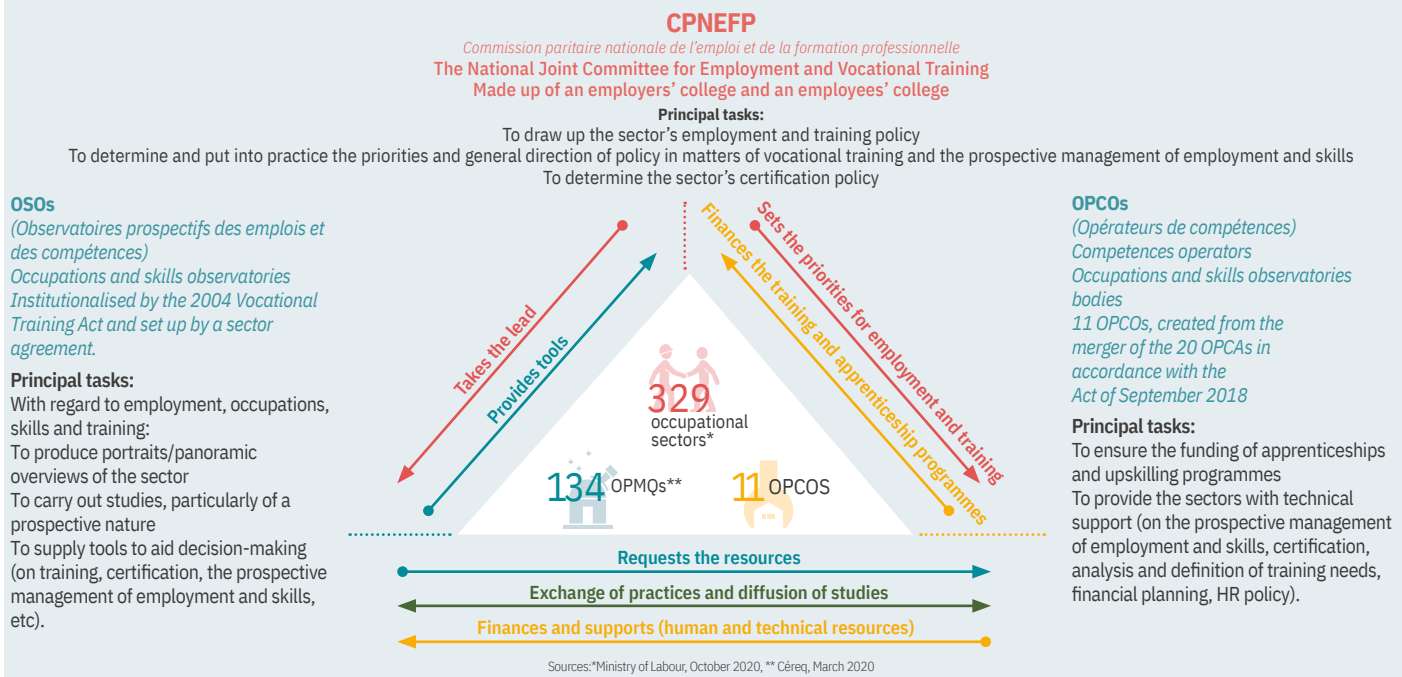
The occupational sectors, which encompass the firms in the same industry covered by a collective agreement, draw up their employment and training policies based on the input from three bodies. The OSOs are the bodies responsible for knowledge production. The National Joint Committee for Employment and Vocational Training (Commission paritaire nationale de l'emploi et de la formation professionnelle or CPNEFP), the policy-making body in each sector, determines its general orientation and priorities in this regard. The opérateur de compétences (Competences operators, or OPCO) is the body responsible for financing and designing training programmes and certifications, through its local units at company level (cf. Box 1). Starting in the 1990s, observatories have been set up on the initiative of either a single sector (e.g. plastics technology) or of a group of occupational sectors in the same industry (e.g. retailing and textiles). Their institutionalisation in the national inter-industry agreement of 2003 and Vocational Training Act of 2004 is based on the principle of one observatory for each occupational sector; in 2020, 85% of the OSOs covered just one occupational sector. Although they are still very diverse, they are firmly established today in the landscape of the occupational sectors and their extensive output is widely used by the social partners to clarify and strengthen their policymaking. They have become established in a constantly evolving institutional environment marked by the reconfiguration of the occupational sectors that started in 2014 and the restructuring of the 20 Organismes paritaires collecteurs agréés (or OPCAs, the authorised joint collection bodies set up to collect, pool and redistribute employers' training levies) into 11

OPCOs following the 2018 reform of vocational training. In the process of rationalisation currently under way, in which cross-cutting and inter-industry approaches are being encouraged by the public authorities, what strengths can the observatories capitalise on in order to cement their place in the provision of support to the occupational sectors? A study conducted by Céreq in partnership with France compétences (cf. box on methodology) reveals for the first time how the social partners use the observatories' various outputs in order to support, clarify and construct their employment and training policies. Thus this edition of Céreq's Training & Employment focuses on how the OSOs' outputs are being used and how their positioning has evolved in the light of the changes that have taken place in their institutional context.

Observatories characterised by diversity

As the technical support bodies for the occupational sectors, the OSOs have never been given a precise legal or organisational form, either when first established in 2004 or in the successive vocational training acts. They are defined by the tasks the occupational sector assigns to them and by their joint management by the CPNEFP. The 2018 reform defined these tasks in outline: to observe, in both quantitative and qualitative terms, employment, occupations, activities and the skills deployed; to anticipate how they might develop and the implications for the forward-looking management of jobs, skills and training needs; to conduct studies and then to draw up reference frameworks and to plan and design certifications (vocational qualification certificates in particular); to disseminate these studies.

1 The bodies in each occupational sector involved in employment and training policy



Because of the lack of a legally defined status, which is linked to the diversity of the occupational sectors to which they are answerable, the OSOs exist in a wide variety of forms with an equally wide variety of characteristics (cf. Box 3). These result from aspects inherited from their foundation, from configurations and operating principles specific to their occupational sector [3] and from recent reconfigurations linked to the OSOs' constitutions. Some OSOs are autonomous organisations with their own personnel, a number of which have adopted the legal status of an association under the Law of Associations of 1901 that governs non-profit associations in France and have forged contractual ties with the OPCO with which they are affiliated. Others are an integral part of an OPCO and use its personnel. Yet others are attached to a professional association and draw on both its personnel and those of the OPCO. This diversity of positionings, already noted by Céreq [1] [2] in 2010, is echoed in their characteristics, such as the scope of their activities, their human and financial resources and their outputs. Nevertheless, they have all been able, over time, to extend their outputs, to tackle a wider range of themes and topics and to strengthen their operational remits.

The OSOs get ahead

The length of time they have been in existence and the expertise they have accumulated have enabled the OSOs to develop and diversify their outputs. And indeed their outputs are very wide-ranging; they include maps and panoramic overviews of occupational sectors, databases, studies and reference frameworks for occupations and for certification schemes and forecasting. The studies that they manage, most of which are actually carried out by service providers, constitute the heart of their activities and are concerned primarily with the

analysis of occupations. Carried out by eight out of ten OSOs, these studies of occupations reveal the extent to which the occupation in question is represented in one or more sectors, its evolution in both quantitative and qualitative terms and the changes it is undergoing, the activities and skills it encompasses and the training needs it generates within companies. Next in importance are thematic or sectoral studies. The former are usually concerned with analyses of training needs, which are cited by three quarters of OSOs, and then with issues around the renewal of the workforce and finally with questions around gender diversity. Logically enough, the differences in operating conditions and modes of functioning affect the volume of studies the OSOs produce, with some producing up to ten studies a year and others just one.

Virtually all the observatories carry out studies today, whereas one third of them had not reached that stage in 2010 [1]. While prospective studies have become widespread, they have moved away from long-term, macro approaches towards targeted, short to medium-term prospective studies very similar to forecasts. Finally the subject of certification has emerged in connection with issues around integration, upskilling and the securing of the career trajectories of employees in the occupational sector. The operational function of the observatories' studies manifests itself in the way in which they are taken up by the social partners.

Operational and strategic work for the actors in the sector

Right from the outset, the OSOs were conceived as tools to aid decision-making in employment and training policy. Over the years, this operational function and the expertise that underpins it, jointly constructed between the policymaking body (CPNEFF) and the technical level (OSO), have become

2 Presentation of the survey and methodology

France compétences, the national regulatory and funding body for vocational training and apprenticeships, is responsible notably for “consolidating, motivating and making public the work of the OSOs”. It was within this framework that France compétences sought a research partnership with Céreq in order to carry out a survey of the various configurations of the OSOs, identify their practices and characterise their modes of operation. The study has two strands.

The first, quantitative strand comprises a survey of all the registered OSOs. Between February and April 2020, 134 OSOs were approached and asked to answer an online, self-administered questionnaire focusing on four themes: the observatory’s characteristics, sphere of operations, functioning and outputs; its relations with the actors in the sector and in the observation of employment and training; its communications policy and, finally, its future prospects, particularly with regard to any studies that might be carried out jointly with other observatories. A total of 83 OSOs completed the questionnaire, giving a response rate of 62% (cf. for an extract from the quantified results).

The second, qualitative strand of the study focuses on seven OSOs selected from among the respondents to the first strand. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with OSO managers, with “Observation” managers in the OPCO to which they are attached and with members of the CPNEFP (employers’ and employees’ colleges). The aim of these interviews, conducted between March and June 2020, was to understand the organisation of the OSOs, the nature of their relations with the OPCOs and the structuring of the observation function within the OPCOs and to gain a greater insight into the uses to which the observatory’s work is put by the social partners in the sector in question.

increasingly significant. The social partners in the CPNEFP have proved themselves very active players in the observatories’ governance and are making increasing use of their work. Thus 55% of the OSOs make recommendations as a matter of course when they have completed a study, whereas only 20% did so in 2010. At that time, half of the OSOs drew up action plans, whereas 80% do so today. The technical level (OSOs and service providers) is usually cited as the one at which recommendations are made, while action plans are usually drawn up at the policymaking level (CPNEFP, professional association). How is this use of the observatories’ outputs illustrated in practical terms?

In general terms, the observatories’ statistical output provides a panoramic overview of developments in employment and occupations which, combined with the social partners’ detailed knowledge of their occupational sector, can be used to identify the questions to be addressed in greater depth. These issues emerge from a combination of the feedback received by the social partners from the actors on the ground and the observatories’ national vision. The studies on the evolution of occupations and skills are resources that the social partners use directly in order to instigate the review of industry classifications. Thus one OSO’s study of the qualifications held by the

various categories of personnel in its sector led to the revision of its classification system. Similarly, the job descriptions compiled within one observatory and their subsequent comparison with those in related sectors provided food for thought in inter-sectoral discussions on retraining, relative attractiveness and even opportunities for the creation of inter-sectoral certifications. In response to the current trend towards the merging of occupational sectors instigated by the public authorities, some “small” sectors are mapping and analysing their occupations in order to inform their choice of sector with which to merge.

When the CPNEFP is faced with a set of problems, a study carried out by the relevant OSO enables policymakers to better objectify and understand the situation. For example, in the case of a small, rather feminised sector, the annual portrait produced by the observatory revealed a deterioration in the pay ratio by level of qualification to the detriment of women, whereas (the gender pay gap) were marginal. In order to understand the origin of the problem, the social partners commissioned the OSO to carry out a detailed observation occupation by occupation.

The occupation studies, which focus on identifying skill requirements and emerging activities, serve as a basis for constructing training policies. They lead, on

3 Survey of the diversity of OSOs’ characteristics

85%

of OSOs work for **1 single CPNEFP**

5% for **2 CPNEFPs**
10% for **3 or + CPNEFPs**

64%

declare a budget lower than **100,000 €**

20% between **100** and **500,000 €**
15% **500,000 €** and +

The number of employees covered ranges from about

1,500 to + 1.4 million

26% of OSOs cover fewer than **15 000 employees**
38% from **15,000** to **84,000 employees**
36% > **84,000 employees**

Half

of the observatories were set up before 2005. They have been in existence for about **14 years** on average.

18% of the OSOs were set up in 2003 or before
51% between 2004 and 2006
31% after 2006

The size of the OSOs questioned varies

from 0 to 6

full-time equivalents (FTEs).

47% have less than $\frac{1}{2}$ an FTE
25% have $\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 FTEs
28% have > 2 FTEs

The number of companies covered ranges from

20 to 628,000

24% of the OSOs cover **250 companies or fewer**
28% from **250** to **2 500 companies**
27% from **2 500** to **15 000 companies**
21% cover > **15 000 companies**

Source: Céreq

the one hand, to the development of a training offer that meets firms' requirements and, on the other, to the creation of certifications, the most important of which are the vocational qualification certificates, established by an occupational sector in order to meet its specific requirements. In this case, the OSO collaborates, often very closely, with the relevant departments of the OPCO, or even with external service providers, on the planning and design of the certification.

The sectoral principle and transversality, between tension and new synergies

All the OSOs' activities and the uses to which the social partners put them are now situated within a landscape that has been remodelled around the 11 OPCOs that between them cover all the occupational sectors. At the behest of the public authorities, the work of the OSOs is now to be carried out much more on a shared basis within the OPCOs. Will this trend towards a strengthening of transversality affect the autonomy of the occupational sectors?

Céreq's study found that the OSOs are generally favourably disposed towards this pooling of their work. No fewer than 77% of OSO managers state that collaboration between observatories is desirable, a view confirmed in interviews by the "Observation" managers in the OPCOs and a high proportion of CPNEFP members. The setting for this collaborative working most frequently cited by OSO managers is the OPCO (64%). The main subjects they identify are: the bridges between and within sectors, mobility, trajectories, skills and the identification of needs in that regard, occupations (mapping, evolution, recruitment needs, attractiveness, etc.), the vocational qualification certificates and certification and the major digital and ecological transitions. These subjects illustrate the OSOs' willingness and capacity to engage positively with the issues of occupational mobility and change, whether in terms of the merging of occupational sectors within the OPCOs or with regard to the more general impacts of technological change, the digitalisation of the economy and the ecological transition.

The study also shows that some projects, or even exercises in collaboration, are already under way in some OPCOs, including efforts to enrich and harmonise barometers in order to adapt them to their new sphere of operations. This type of cross-cutting output receives support from the Engagements de développement de l'emploi et des compétences (commitments to develop employment and skills, or EDECs). EDECs link central government and the occupational sectors by means of contracts and

joint funding arrangements and are extensively used by the latter to support their own initiatives or their collaborative projects to be implemented within an OPCO or even at inter-OPCO level. Although the real purpose of EDECs is to support actions or the development of training programmes or other services targeted at companies, they also include research and diagnosis phases that involve the OSOs. The OPCOs' "Observation" managers have taken advantage of them in order to bring the sectors together around common problems, to encourage mutual acquaintanceship and to jointly fund the development of durable tools (permanent survey arrangements, data dissemination portals etc.). The influence of the EDECs' financial arrangements and their focus on certain topics produce a "lever" effect that in turn fosters a shared dynamic between OSOs. The 2018 Act actually encourages the OPCOs to give priority to funding multi-sector approaches involving all or part of their occupational fields.

●— Thus all the conditions seem to be in place in terms of feasibility, opportunity and intention at the technical level for the OSOs' work to be pooled within the OPCOs. Nevertheless, tensions arise between the sectors' autonomy in the construction of their employment and training policies and the governance of their OSOs and this trend towards the rationalisation and transversality of the OSOs' outputs. For the occupational sectors there is, after all, a risk that they will see a loosening of the ties between their specific problems, the work of the observatories and their operationalisation in training programmes and certifications that constitute the central pillar of the single-sector OSO model. Whether or not the manifold concerns of the sectors represented by a single OSO will converge remains an open question. Moreover, the budgets on which the OSOs can draw in order to conduct their studies stem from the OPCOs' operating lines of credit (fixed in contracts with the Ministry of Labour), or possibly from contributions stipulated in the collective agreement covering their sector. This immediately raises the question of the trade-offs the OSOs might make between cross-cutting studies and studies more specifically linked to the issues of concern to a single sector. What degree of autonomy and what room for manoeuvre is the CPNEFP going to be able to retain in order to steer its observatory's work towards its own priorities? How will the health, economic and social crisis we are currently going through reorient the occupational sectors' priorities and shift the focus of the OSOs' studies? —●

→ Learn more

[1] *État des lieux des observatoires prospectifs métiers qualifications*, D'Agostino A., Delanoë A., Machado J., Céreq/CPNEFP, 98 p., 2011.

[2] « Les observatoires prospectifs des métiers et des qualifications: des outils pour agir », D'Agostino A., Delanoë A., Céreq Bref n° 297-2, 2012.

[3] « L'appui des branches professionnelles aux entreprises : trois logiques d'action », D'Agostino A., Dif-Pradalier M., Quintero N., Céreq Bref n° 338, 2015.

[4] *Les OPMQ : un outil des partenaires sociaux dans la construction de leur politique emploi-formation de branche - Etat des lieux et perspectives*, Delanoë A., Quintero N., Valette-Wursthén A., Céreq Etudes, à paraître.

➔ Subscribe to our newsletter

Céreq

SINCE 1971
Get to know the training - employment - work links better.
A scientific collective at the service of public action.

+ info and all studies
on www.cereq.fr



National public institution under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Employment.

T&E N° 150 | 2021 | Newsletter on employment and training research from Céreq

Publications manager:
Florence Lefresne
Translation:
Andrew Wilson

Reproduction permitted provided that the source is cited / Published free of charge
Registration of copyright 1st trimester 2021 / ISSN 2119-0496
Centre d'études et de recherches sur les qualifications
10, place de la Joliette CS 21321 • 13567 Marseille Cedex 02 / T. +33 (0)4 91 13 28 28
All of our publications are available on our web site at www.cereq.fr