

Part 4

Higher Education, Lifelong Learning and Social Inclusion

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INTERACTIONS BETWEEN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING AND THE LABOUR MARKET IN FRANCE: A COUNTRY REPORT

Abstract

This paper presents formal interactions between vocational education and training and the labour market in France, part of a large European study commissioned by the Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop). The paper examines the nature of vocational education and training system, the feedback mechanisms and the characterisation of the feedback loops in vocational education and training system in France. The paper concludes with a highlight of the significant features of the interactions between vocational education and training and the labour market in France.

Keywords: VET, Labour market, feedback mechanisms, feedback loops

Introduction

The French model of vocational education and training as related to the initial vocational education and training is centralised and embedded in the comprehensive education system (Ogunleye, 2011) in that the state has a sole responsibility for curricula contents and the examinations. The VET is operated in the context of coordinated market economy. The main elements of the coordination are the national government and the social partners – the trade unions, chambers of commerce and the employers association. The VET partners have a tradition of negotiating and signing up national agreements that underpin the implementations of VET policies. The most recent activity was the signing up of National Agreement on employees' access to vocational training and the establishment of observatories for monitoring occupations and qualifications. The first track of vocational education is situated in the secondary school system—initial vocational education and training (IVET), where students in upper secondary schools combine classroom learning with practical workshop activities. The stakeholders in VET have continued to monitor the labour market vis-a-vis the current economic recession. To that end, and in order to minimise the impacts of the economic recession on the labour market, the social partners, with the approval of the government, have signed two National Inter-professional Agreements (or ANI) that focus on life-long vocational training,

professionalism and on the human resources management of the effects of the recession on employment, as well as on measures to support employment (Refnet, 2011). These two agreements are in addition to a number of such framework agreements signed by VET stakeholders. For example, two national agreements dated 11 January 2008 and another one dated 14 November 2008 relate to the modernisation of the labour market and management of jobs and skills. The national government current policy priorities are to maintain existing jobs in the labour market, stimulate and create new jobs, and provide access to the labour market.

Overview of formalised feedback mechanisms

Lower and upper secondary vocational education: The responsibility for policy at this level of education – vocational training in schools through to apprenticeship – falls on the Ministry of Education (although Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries is responsible for curricula in agricultural secondary schools). The curricula in upper secondary school including instruction are determined centrally by the state. At the national level, the *Centre d'Analyse Stratégique* (CAS), located in the Office of the Prime Minister, has responsibility for monitoring trends in the economy and labour market generally. CAS produces authoritative regular reports that are used to inform policy at national and regional levels. A major way the state anticipates skills needs, future employment and training provision in the economy is through CEP (Contract for a Prospective Study). CEP is an alliance of the government and social partners through which the stakeholders ascertain skills needs of a sector and provides a diagnosis or action to bridge the skills gap.

Regionally, there are observatories for job and training. An example is OREF (Regional monitoring institute on employment and vocational training), which collects and analyses data on skills and the labour market, especially data relating to regional trades and regional qualifications. Data are collected from regional bodies as diverse as councils, departments, National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies, Ministry of Education and chambers of commerce. At the sectoral level, the CPCs (Advisory Committees on Occupations) ensure that the competencies acquired on completion of IVET programmes match the skills needs of the labour market. Each sector's CPC is responsible for assessing the needs for a (new) qualification, prepare the qualification including a list of the subjects to be taught under the qualification, outline the structure and organisation of the examinations to be taken, etc and send off documentation to the Minister of National Education for approval. Once the new qualification is approved, it is then feed into teaching programmes in upper secondary level education.

Also at sectoral level, OPQM (the institute for monitoring future trends in occupations and qualifications) provides analyses of skills trends on the labour market; the outcome of which is then used to effect changes in the supply of skills and qualifications. *National Commission for Vocational Qualification* (CNCP) has a sole responsibility for identifying valid/recognised qualifications in France. However, to make qualifications more transparent, the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) has been established. The NQF has five levels comparable to the European Qualifications Framework. The NQF grid shows pathways to both further studies and employment through qualifications in a range of occupational/labour market sectors. Schools are responsible for the teaching of the curricula, but the

organisation and content of vocational education are centrally driven and specific (in terms of methods and means of training/instructions). For example, the timetable of vocational training often specified the total number of training time on CAP (professional skills certificate) and on vocational baccalaureate.

Characterisations of formal feedback loops

Assessing Demand

The *Centre d'Analyse Stratégique* (CAS), located in the Office of the Prime Minister, has responsibility for monitoring trends in the economy and labour market. The centre collects data/information from a variety of sources mainly regional bodies such as CEP (contract for a prospective study), CEREQ (centre for research on education, training and employment), OPQM (institute for monitoring future trends in occupations and qualifications) and OPEF (regional monitoring institute on employment and vocational training). *Centre d'Analyse Stratégique* is an authoritative research and monitoring government agency in France and, in the recent years, it has teamed up with government departments and other organisations to conduct studies on skills needs in many occupation and trade sectors. Recently, CAS teamed up with the Ministry of Employment and Social Cohesion's Directorate of Research and Statistics to assess the labour market demand and supply in a number of professional disciplines. The study entitled *Trades in 2015* examines the evolution of employment in a number of sectors, how many people will retire from identified trades, what is the current profile of workers in the identified trades (Cedefop, 2008). In 2012, CAS also teamed up with DARES to produce a similar report entitled *Trades in 2020*. However, to assess skills demand in the labour market, France adopts macroeconomic models to generate occupational and educational forecasts to arrive at recruitment demands according to type and volume of qualifications. The French forecasting models factored in different scenarios including changes in company training strategies and behaviours (Peer Review, 2006). There is no central forecasting body; as such the Ministry of Labour uses macro-models and scenarios to produce 'occupational family forecasts at industry level'. The Ministry of Education, too, uses macro-models to produce forecast on skills needs, gaps and anticipation, according to the levels of qualification.

Occupational standards

The Ministry of Education which is responsible for policy in secondary education produces forecast on skills needs, gaps and anticipation, according to the levels of qualification. The educational forecasts are used to derive recruitment demands according to type and volume of qualifications. The CPCs (Advisory Committees on Occupations) is also a major actor in matching information on skills demand; it ensures that the competencies acquired on completion of IVET programmes match the skills needs on the labour market. The CPC assesses the need for a qualification, provides an outline of the curriculum to be taught and the examinations to be taken, get the government approval for the course/qualification and then ensure the teaching of the course in upper secondary schools. Region-based *Académies* are important stakeholders in ensuring occupational standards while performing their management oversight (responsibility) of school-based IVET. *Académie* in each region matches the demand and supply of vocational courses;

assess the demand for a qualification and the supply of that qualification; *Académies* also conduct assessments of the underpinning competences on IVET provision; decides whether a school should start VET courses and at what level. *Académies* receive input from CCREFP (regional coordination committee on employment and vocational training). CCREFP is made up of the representatives from regional authorities, the social partners, regional chambers of commerce and industry and trade representatives.

National qualification structure feedback loop

The National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) facilitates access and provides transparency to qualifications in France. The NFQ is a system of 5 levels; the NFQ grid shows pathways to both further education and employment through qualifications in a range of occupational/labour market sectors. *National Commission for Vocational Qualification (CNCP)* has sole responsibility for identifying valid qualification.

- Schools are responsible for the teaching of the curricula, but the organisation and content of vocational education are centrally driven and specific (specific methods and means of training/ instructions). For example, the timetable of vocational training specified the total number of training time on CAP (professional skills Certificate) and on vocational baccalaureate.
- Representative of the social partners, regional chambers of commerce, agriculture, industry and trade input into qualifications awarded at upper secondary level (IVET courses) through CCREFP which works with *Académies*, which manage schools in the regions.

Curriculum development

The central government through the Ministry of Education determines curricula in secondary school. The central government also determines how much time a school devotes to each subject every week. In terms of the initial vocational education and training curricula, the state provides input into the design of the curricula although the primary responsibility lies with the CPCs (Professional Consultative Commission), which are national bodies. The CPCs are also mandated to consult with the social partners in designing all vocational curricula (vocational diplomas). Representatives of business are also involved in the IVET curriculum development as well as in the certification process; representatives of business also sit on the panel that award vocational diplomas.

Variations of feedback mechanisms on the regional level

In 2009 the two government agencies providing employment services in France – ANPE and ANAEM – merged to form *Pôle-Emploi* (National Employment Agency). *Pôle-Emploi* employs 45,000 civil servants and operates in all the 26 regions across France. The main responsibilities of *Pôle-Emploi* are to register job seekers, offer career guidance and assist them to find job and pay them jobseekers benefits; it also collects statistics on vacancies and on job seekers in general. *Pôle-Emploi* also provides services to employers – for instance, it helps companies with recruitment and re-training. In this role, therefore, *Pôle-Emploi* matches information on demand and supply in the labour market at occupational, local and regional levels through its recruitment service to jobseekers and employers (for example, the

agency helps employers in the selection of suitable candidates). Employers report vacancies as they arise to *Pôle-Emploi* and jobseekers are matched to reported vacancies.

Centre d'Analyse Stratégique (CAS) located in the Office of the Prime Minister, monitor employment trends in sectors and occupations and in the economy as a whole. CAS recently teamed up with the Ministry of Employment and Social Cohesion's Directorate of Research and Statistics to assess the labour market demand and supply in a number of professional disciplines with a forward-looking report entitled *Trades in 2015*.

The 26 French regional authorities have responded differently to the current economic recession depending on their individual circumstances. However, since the main focus of the state through its *plan for the re-launch of the economy* is to maintain current level of employment, support access to employment and stimulate jobs, regional authorities have focused their own policy measures on jobs and training. Regional governments offered support to companies to help them to keep employees in work, offered training incentives to companies in particularly difficult economic situation. The European Social Fund (ESF) has been very active at both regional and local levels in France. The ESF has provided financial support to local authorities which in turn incentivised companies to preserve jobs and to encourage employees training and skills upgrade.

CCREFP, the Regional Coordination Committees for Employment and Vocational Training, represents employers' association, trade union, education providers, regional and national policy makers. CCREFP main tasks are to analyse trends on the labour market, produce policy to bridge the gap between demand and supply of labour and foster or strengthen the link/cooperation between companies and VET. There are three groups within CCREFP, each with differing working methods. The first is consultative working method, through which the CCREFP consults with the social partners by exchanging information on training activity within regional labour market observatories (OREF); the second working method is review, through which the CCREFP review and agree training activity with the stakeholders; and the third working method involved matching employment and training in the labour market. The CCREFP is also very active in planning regional training in key economic sectors.

Interaction of feedback mechanisms with institutional settings

The state, through *Pôle-Emploi* (the National Employment Agency), region and local authorities and the social partners has maintained interactions on a range of employment initiatives. At the height of the increase in number of job seekers relative to the general working population, the stakeholders set up funds to train and pay job seekers while in training. *Pôle-Emploi*, which has regional and local presence, provides short-term training to job seekers with the sole aim of matching their skills with current businesses needs. Where there is an acute skills shortage in a particular local area (or a particular sector of the economy), the Director of *Pôle-Emploi* may intervene by directing resources to ensure that training adequately meets skills demand.

There is a national agreement between the central government, the regions and social partners and between the social partners on a range of issues including

collective bargaining and access to vocational training; and observatories for occupations and qualifications. For example, the national agreement that provides for the observatories of occupations and qualifications sought to monitor the evolution of occupations at national and regional levels, projecting the emergence of new jobs as well as the deletion of 'old' jobs. Besides, there are National Inter-professional Agreements (ANIs) between employers' association and the trade union; in the past such agreements have covered a range of issues relating to the labour including rights to training for employees and employees' rights to attend training courses. Also, there have been national inter-professional agreements on the development of lifelong learning vocational training, professionalism, job security, management of the impact of economic recession on employment; and on the establishment of special funds for vocational training and the entitlement of priority individuals (low skilled unemployed) to access the fund. Numerous national framework agreements have been signed in the recent years, some of which are managed regionally and applied across sectors and occupations. National Inter-professional Agreements often ended in statute books after the parliament has debated the issues. There exists greater cooperation between the state, regions and the social partners – an example was a partnership between the OPCA (Approved Joint Collecting Bodies) and a regional chamber of commerce in Lozere to plan training and develop skills.

Conclusion

France faces the most serious economic recession in a generation. Part of the Government response, as set out its 'plan for the relaunch of the economy' (*plan de relance de l'économie*) is to maintain the existing the workforce, create new jobs and facilitate access to employment. To that end, the state has taken steps to: guarantee qualification to 80% of students in high schools, to discourage youngsters from leaving school early without qualifications or vocational training; reform and reorganise education at upper secondary school level – for example, *Bac professionnel* will henceforth be completed in 3 years and not 4 years as it was previously the case; expand secondary school-based vocational diplomas. For example, there is now available of *Bac professionnel* in 75 disciplines which can be obtained in both upper secondary school and in CFA-run apprentice's centres (IVET); ensure that, at the sectoral level, the competencies acquired on completion of IVET programmes match the skills needs of the labour market; ensure clear cut path ways through the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Additionally, France labour reforms would: ensure that the NQF five levels are comparable to European Qualifications Framework to achieve clear pathways to both further studies and employment through qualifications in a range of occupational/labour market sectors; ensure that the regional coordination committee on employment and vocational training has played an active role in matching skills demands on the regional labour market, establishing FNE (the national fund for employment) to help companies retain employees, train or upgrade skills. FNE would allow the state to intervene where a company faces very serious economic crises; ensuring that where there is an acute skills shortage in a particular local area (or a particular sector of the economy), the Director of *Pôle-Emploi* may intervene by directing resources to ensure that training adequately meets skills demand.

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