



# Files on school Education in France

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**Vocational Education**

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# Foreword



Long seen as a lesser alternative to academic education, vocational training earned its stripes some twenty years ago in the French educational system. Changes to qualifications and training courses, better linkages to the industry and the job market, and enhanced apprenticeship programmes involving part-time study at a training centre, have all contributed to the transformation of training provision and opened up new opportunities. Vocational training has made a significant contribution to reducing the school dropout rate and has been a laboratory for the development of innovative teaching methodologies. It has overcome its image as an option for “underachievers” and has gained a reputation for excellence.

Links with the world of work have been strengthened and assessment arrangements put in place in order to assess skills and aptitudes acquired and those to be developed. It was in this sector that objective-oriented teaching and, later, training and qualification frameworks were devised and, eventually, implemented more widely.

Vocational training is now: an important part of the French education and training system. It is based on a careful balance between academic education, vocational training and links with the world of work. It enables vocational students to access careers in all sectors, without losing sight of the importance of academic education.

# The Vocational Route in France



In respect of initial vocational training, students have two options - full-time training in a vocational secondary school or an on-the-job apprenticeship with part-time study at a training centre.

## **The vocational secondary school (lycée professionnel)**

Students can choose to go to a vocational school at the age of 15 on leaving a collège (lower secondary school). Lycées professionnels prepare students for a variety of vocational qualifications, including vocational Baccalaureates. The full-time training includes work placements, which are mandatory and integral part of the course.

## **New Concepts in Teaching**

With the re-working of vocational qualifications came a revolution in related teaching methods, as the academic education programmes were enriched to better meet the needs and requirements of industry.

Two initiatives, in particular, stand out:

## **The Multi-Disciplinary Vocational Project (PPCP)**

Multi-disciplinary project work, in small groups, is designed to develop knowledge and skills relevant to the world of work. The teaching staff have a great deal of latitude in choosing the projects to be undertaken during the year, from the subject matter to the length, magnitude and number of projects, not to mention the level of involvement of each group of students, and the time to be allotted to each project component. Based on the concept of teamwork, the PPCP teaches how to acquire work and research methods, reinforces the work-related aspects of the training programme, and helps students to map out their personal development and career plans.

## **Citizenship Education (Civics, Law and Society)**

One of the major roles of the education system is to develop citizens who are capable of fulfilling their rights and responsibilities. With this in mind, citizenship education (literally translated as Civics, Law and Society) has been introduced into all secondary schools to ensure that each student benefits from a comprehensive citizenship education.

## **The International Dimension: A Great Strength of Vocational Education**

European units (sections) have been set up in vocational schools with a view to improving students' language skills and to promote international mobility. The teaching of vocational subjects in a foreign language means that students are better prepared to undertake work placements abroad, so improving their job prospects.

### Facts and Figures on Academic Year 2001/2002

695 000 students in vocational education (public and private)

1 secondary school student out of 3 is in a vocational secondary school (lycée professionnel)

1 742 vocational secondary schools (public and private)

371 500 apprentices

1 215 apprentice training centres (CFA)

47% of those in vocational secondary schools are female

74.6% of apprentices are male



With effect from the 2002/3 academic year, this provision has been extended to the Vocational Education Diploma (BEP) and certain Vocational Baccalaureates.

### Apprenticeship Training

This type of training combines workplace experience with part-time study during working hours at an apprentice training centre (CFA). With time spent in the company and the apprentice training centre (CFA), apprenticeship training involves a close partnership between the employer and the training centre.

The employer and the apprentice are bound by an apprenticeship contract which is identical to a work contract and subject to French Labour Law as well as industry-wide agreements. The apprentice works for an employer and receives a salary and s/he receives training both at the CFA and in the workplace.

### Specific Teaching Methods

Training provision at the CFA supports and complements the apprentices' on-the-job experience, so as to ensure that they acquire the necessary skills to do the job. CAP students spend an average of 450 hours per year at the CFA and BEP students spend 500 hours (750 hours for vocational Baccalaureate or Higher National Diploma students (Brevets de Techniciens Supérieurs).

### Vocational Qualifications

These qualifications, which are put together with the input from industry, are updated regularly. The CPCs (Vocational Advisory Committees) work together to develop a reference framework for each diploma.

### The Certificat d'aptitude professionnelle (CAP) [First Vocational Skills Certificate]

This is a specialised diploma that requires specific job-related skills and is designed to ensure quick entry into the working world. It is a 2 year course which students begin on completion of Year 10 at the age of 15/16

The CAP is a long-standing diploma, having been introduced in 1911. Since March 2002, it has been divided into 6 or 7 units, either academic or vocational, which can be acquired gradually. In addition, students must undertake a 12 to 16 week work placement.

These new developments are expected to enable a large number of students of this age to gain a first diploma. The modular format should also improve the success rate, as experience acquired can be accredited in stages. There are around 250 CAP certificates, covering all sectors. Equal time is allocated to academic education and vocational or technological training.

With nearly 290 000 candidates and 216 000 CAPs awarded in 2001, the CAP is the leading vocational qualification in France.

### **The Brevet d'études professionnelles (BEP) [Vocational Diploma]**

Like the CAP, the BEP is a 2 year course open to students on completion of Year 10. However, it is a broader qualification and gives students the opportunity to continue their studies, normally by taking a vocational or technological Baccalaureate level. On completion the students have qualified or skilled worker (level V) status. There are over 50 different subject areas available.

The curriculum is divided into 50% technological or vocational training and 50% academic education. It also involves a 4-8 week work placement.

### **The Vocational Baccalaureate (Bac Pro)**

When it was first launched in 1985, this level-IV qualification covered five occupational areas. With effect from 2002, there are now 61, including specialist options. This qualification offers excellent opportunities to gain employment quickly and is very much focussed on the world of work, with an average of 16 weeks of on-the-job training, spread over this two year course. The focus of this qualification is on vocational and technological subjects, though academic subjects are not neglected. There is coursework in maths, French, history and geography, one modern language, physical education, art, and citizenship, to name but a few.



# Recent Policy Developments



These are intended to:

- ease the transition into vocational training programmes,
- clarify training routes and opportunities for progression,
- enrich and promote vocational training,
- reduce the number of students dropping out with no qualifications

## **Measures to increase the take-up of vocational education**

One of the main goals is to increase awareness of the choices available through better information and guidance. Students gain a better appreciation of the practical aspects of different jobs through workshops, workplace visits, open days, and mini-apprenticeships in vocational schools.

Building bridges between lower secondary schools (collèges) and vocational secondary schools (LP) helps struggling students come up with a career plan, revives their interest in academic education and gives them a better chance of leaving school with qualifications. Pupils at lower secondary schools (collèges) have the opportunity to take some vocational subjects at a vocational secondary school (LP), or spend some time in companies, from as early as Year 9 at the age of 14. These programmes combine academic education, vocational training and a taste of the world of work.



## **An evolving range of training programmes**

Training provision at vocational secondary schools is constantly evolving to meet, as far as possible, students' needs and improve their job prospects. The curriculum is reviewed and updated by Vocational Advisory Committees (CPC). These committees also consider the harmonisation of European Union qualifications.

Vocational training programmes are, in most cases, designed to award qualifications that enable students to get a job quickly; however, opportunities for progression and further training as part of a coherent overall framework are also important. For instance, there are clear linkages on completion of Year 12 at age 17 between the vocational and the technological paths, so making it possible for BEP students to go on to do a technological Baccalaureate.



### **The Vocational Licence: A New Alternative**

Students who wish to continue their studies beyond the Higher National Diploma (Brevet de technicien supérieur) can do so by working toward a vocational degree (licence).

This is a one-year training programme that leads to a diploma equivalent to three years post-Baccalaureate level. The course is delivered by the vocational secondary school in partnership with a university.

In 2002, 610 vocational degrees (licences) were taken, mainly in the agriculture and service sectors.

## **A new concept: le lycée des métiers**

Lycées des métiers are recognised as centres of excellence and offer vocational training up to 3 years of post-Baccalaureate.

### **Focus on Quality**

Any secondary school offering vocational training can seek to gain recognition as a 'lycée des métiers'.

This quality label confirms that the school is able to deliver training to students of varying backgrounds and adapt the training offer to meet the needs of both young people and adults, thus ensuring that, whatever their level, students can gain a qualification.

### **A comprehensive offer**

Through partnerships with industry and other training providers, Lycées des métiers offer a variety of different training paths and prepare students for an extensive range of national diplomas and certificates. Their objective is, first and foremost, to enable students at all levels to gain access to vocational qualifications. From the CAP to the vocational degree or licence (three years post Baccalaureate), they offer clearer progression routes and career paths which are easily understood by both students and their parents. They encourage students to continue their studies, but also offer flexibility, making it possible for a young person to move from apprenticeship to full-time training in vocational schools or from the vocational to the technological route.

### **An upper secondary school for all students**

Lycées des métiers are open to apprentices, secondary school pupils, higher education students, work-based trainees, employees on professional development programmes or adults who want to have their experience in the workplace validated. This new kind of school aims to produce a highly qualified workforce. Students gain qualifications at all levels and get help in finding a job.

### **A player in local development**

Lycées des métiers are part of a local network led by the Académies (regional educational authorities), and are destined to become full-fledged players in local and regional development. They have close links with the industry and local partners; cooperating and pooling their skills to best serve a changing job market.



Lycée Maximilien Perret in Alfortville, from the Académie de Créteil, is one of the first lycées des métiers. This is an interview with Bernard Plasse, Principal at the school.

### How would you describe your school?

**Bernard Plasse:** We are a secondary school specialising in energy and climate engineering. The school offers a wide range of training programmes. There are 1200 students in initial vocational training, working toward qualifications that range from the CAP to the BTS. There are also 450 apprentices based in four CFAs (apprenticeship training centres). On top of that, we train adults and deliver a large GRETA programme focused on energy-related trades. Together, this constitutes a true training hub, which has been recognised by industry and the various target groups that we serve.

### How do you work with companies?

**B.P:** We have always worked closely with industry. The school was founded by a heating engineer and is now 115 years old. The CFA was set up within the school with the support of a trade union for the heating sector. Our relationship with industry is somewhat unique. For instance, employers keep very close tabs on the students' progress, in particular through work placements. The young people are closely monitored and assessed in the work place and getting a job in the same company after completion of the placement is extremely crucial. Continuous professional development programmes involve more regular contact with employers and, as a matter of fact, one of our staff has specific responsibility for external relations and works with industry contacts on a day-to-day basis.

The companies' strong presence also has an impact on the content of the training courses; for instance, we work with them on developing the training frameworks. In fact, we have just set up a customised GRETA training programme, specifically designed to meet the needs of one of our partner companies.

### Future priorities?

**B.P:** We need to broaden our student-tutoring programmes and provide more support to weaker students. As regards adult training, there is still a great deal to do in creating more opportunities for individuals to access modular-based training programmes. Another area that we are working on a lot concerns validation of work experience. Our school also needs to raise awareness among the general public of the opportunities available. Teachers already provide guidance and counselling to future students. Lastly, we are working more and more with the Ile-de-France region. Our aim is to adapt training provision to meet local needs. That is central to co-operation between our Académie and the Region.



# Validating Work Experience: a New Culture?

## Key information

In 2002, nearly 8 000 people gained accreditation for work experience.

Depending on the diploma in question, 20 to 40% of the people obtained the diploma they wanted. The other candidates have five years to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge. Two out of three candidates worked in the service sector and one out of four in industry.

The value of work experience and its contribution to skills development is recognised and is now integrated into national codes of practice for work and education.

As early as 1992, the law regarding the validation of work experience made it possible for any person with at least five years of experience in the workplace to gain exemption from the exams required for certain qualifications, based on the recognition of existing skills and knowledge either acquired in employment or through voluntary work.

Since 2002, this new approach has been reinforced, confirming the importance of two equally important routes to obtaining a qualification through training programmes and work experience. Validation of work experience therefore broadens the opportunities for gaining a qualification and thus has a wider social value in enabling people to access lifelong learning opportunities.

## Which diplomas for which students?

Validation of work experience applies to anyone who has worked for at least three years in a field related to a diploma, whatever their status: employee, self-employed, craftsman, tradesperson, professional, job-seeker, voluntary worker, etc, regardless of age.

The objective is to enable those who have not had the opportunity of academic training but who have gained professional knowledge and skills to nevertheless obtain a formal qualification, which has real social value in the workplace. Their experience may be such as to give them a full diploma or enable them to gain exemption from part of the diploma examinations.

All vocational or technological diplomas offered by the national educational system, from the CAP to doctoral degrees, with the exception of academic diplomas such as academic Baccalaureates or medical diplomas and university diplomas.

# Further Information

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French Ministry for Youth, National Education and Research:  
**[education.gouv.fr/enspro/](http://education.gouv.fr/enspro/)**

Pedagogical website designed by the Schools Directorate:  
**[eduscol.education.fr/](http://eduscol.education.fr/)**

CNRAA (National Resource Centre for Apprenticeship  
Programmes):  
**[ac-nancy-metz.fr/cnraa/](http://ac-nancy-metz.fr/cnraa/)**

Senior Committee for Education, Economics and Employment:  
**[cisad.adc.education.fr/hce3](http://cisad.adc.education.fr/hce3)**





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