Official guidelines on traineeships and apprenticeships

A number of training programmes combining practical experience at a company with more theoretical education are on offer to young people, who can opt for work/study courses or traineeships depending on their qualifications, diplomas and career choices. Such programmes, enabling acquisition of professional aptitudes and skills along with theoretical knowledge, enable young people to integrate the world of work more rapidly.

Work/study

There are two types of work/study contracts: the apprenticeship contract [1] and the professionalisation [2] contract

1) The apprenticeship contract

Apprenticeship is a work/study programme combining practical training at a company with theoretical classes delivered by an Apprentice Training Centre (CFA – centre de formation d’apprentis [3]). It is not
compulsory, but is matter of choice. Apprenticeship is based on a work contract that binds an employer and an apprentice who, as he/she is paid a wage, is subject to the rules of the Labour Code and the same collective conventions as other employees.

As regards social cover, apprentices (16 y/o and above) are affiliated to the General Social Security Scheme (RGSS - régime général de la sécurité sociale). They also have the right to paid leave and maternity leave, and their pension and unemployment benefit rights come into effect.

Young people under 15 y/o can conclude an apprenticeship contract provided they have completed their lower secondary education. Over 25 y/o can also enter an apprenticeship under certain conditions, disabled young people in particular, for whom other provisions exist, including the “adjusted contract” (contrat aménagé [4]), which facilitates their professional integration.

Apprenticeships are carried out in a wide variety of professional sectors, including foodstuffs, commerce, construction, the automobile industry and public works, as well as in service sectors. Apprenticeship is becoming increasingly important as a mode of training for careers in the tertiary sector. More than one in every two contracts prepares for a service profession.

During the programme, apprentices spend a third of their time at a CFA and the other two thirds at a company. CFA classes take up at least 400 hours a year, with apprentices following courses provided for and defined in school curricula. When at the company for which they work, apprentices are under the responsibility of a mentor who provides them with support and passes on his/her knowhow.

Reform the apprenticeship (See Current debates and reforms [5])

The law n° 2018-771 of September 5, 2018 for “the Freedom to choose one’s professional future” modified in depth the system apprenticeship [6] which was piloted by the regional authorities since the law of January 7th, 1983.

As of January 1, 2019, apprenticeship will now be piloted by the professional branches that will be involved in the construction of diplomas and will set the cost of apprenticeship contracts. In addition, the regions no longer decide on the opening of apprenticeship training centres (CFA).

The law provides in particular that:

- the apprenticeship age training limit goes from 25 to 30 years;
- the remuneration of apprentices increases;
- a new financing method is proposed: the financing of apprenticeship centres will be evaluated according to the number of contracts signed in 2020.
- the over 25s young people are paid at least at the minimum wage level;
- young apprentices whose contracts are interrupted during the course of the year may extend their training at the Apprentice Training Center for 6 months;
- young people have to benefit from several annual days of information on business sectors, apprenticeship jobs;
- pre-apprenticeship training is organized for young people wishing to move towards apprenticeship but lacking the necessary skills.
2) The professionalization contract

This is designed for a wider public than the apprenticeship contract. It is aimed at:

- young people 16-25 y/o;
- jobseekers 26 y/o and over;
- beneficiaries of the RSA – minimum income, ASS – special solidarity allowance (*allocation de solidarité spécifique*) or the AAH – disabled adults’ allowance (*allocation aux adultes handicapés*);

Programmes last between 6 months and 1 or even 2 years. Remuneration of young people on professionalisation contracts varies according to level of initial training and age. Unlike apprenticeship contracts, the State, local authorities and their public administrative bodies may not conclude professionalization contracts.

Legal framework for work/study programmes

Work/study programmes are defined and regulated by a whole series of articles in the Labour Code which, among other things, stipulate:

- Taking of and preparation for exams: *Labour Code: Articles L6222-34 to L6222-36* [7];
- Contributions and exemptions: *Labour Code: Articles L6243-2 to L6243-3* [8];
- The remuneration provided for in the contract: *Labour Code: Articles R6222-2 to R6222-5* [9];
- The reference rate compared with the SMIC: *Labour Code: Articles D6222-26 to D6222-35* [10];
- Work prohibited and regulated for young people of at least 15 y/o: *Labour Code: Articles D4153-15 to D4153-37* [11];

Traineeships

Students enrolled at higher education institutions can benefit from initial contact with the world of work via traineeships, **temporary periods of professional placement**, during which they acquire professional skills and use their learning outcomes with a view to obtaining a diploma or certification. When traineeships in a professional environment are incorporated into a training syllabus, they are compulsory; however, not all higher education courses require traineeship periods.

**Traineeships are based on a compulsory tripartite convention between the student, the host organisation and the educational institution.**

When they last more than two consecutive months, they are subject to a monthly bonus. Traineeships last for a maximum of six months. The bonus is set at 15% of the social security ceiling, i.e. €3.60 per hour worked; however, an activity sector convention or extended professional agreement may set a higher rate and pay out a larger sum in consequence.

**Trainees do not enjoy employee status**, in particular because they are not connected with host companies by a work contract.
Their experience in the public or private host organisation is gained for professionalising and educational purposes, even though they may carry out tasks of a professional nature. They are only at the company to learn and observe. No traineeship convention may be concluded for the carrying out of a regular task corresponding to a permanent position, seasonal job or replacement of an absent employee. During their traineeships, students are subject to dual supervision, by a designated supervisor at their university (Professor) and a tutor at the host company. The latter is responsible for receiving and assisting the trainee. He/she acts as guarantor of compliance with the tripartite convention. As regards social security, trainees remain affiliated to the social security health insurance scheme they are already members of (student schemes).

**Legal framework**

Conduct of traineeships is defined and supervised by a whole series of articles in the Education Code and Labour Code including:

- **Article L124-6** of the Education Code, *which governs bonus conditions*
- **The law of 10 July 2014 bearing on development and supervision of traineeships and improvement of trainee status** enacted on 26 October 2015, which complements trainees’ rights and is intended to combat employers’ abuse of traineeships. The law reinforces the educational aspect of traineeships along with trainees’ status, in particular by increasing their monthly bonus (which was increased from €436 to €523 at the start of the 2015-2016 academic year)
- **Law no.2011-893 of 28 July 2011**, known as the “Cherpion” law, on development of work/study programmes and the securing of vocational paths, which reinforces trainees’ rights and protection by stating that “traineeships are only legal if they are the subject of a tripartite agreement between the trainee, the (public or private) host organisation and the higher education institute”
- **Law no.2013-660 of 22 July 2013** bearing on higher education and research, which reasserts the provisions of the "Cherpion" law and strengthens the legal framework, in particular by defining traineeships, their educational content, and bonuses involved.

**Sequence of observation in professional environments for pupils in the final year of lower secondary education**

Lower secondary students (11-15 y/o) get a *first taste of professional experience with the sequence of observation in professional environments* (séquence d'observation en milieu professionnel), which aims to “make pupils aware of the technological, economic and professional environment in conjunction with syllabuses”. This short-term professional integration is compulsory for all pupils in their final year of lower secondary education, in application of the provisions of **Article D. 332-14 of the Education Code**.

It may be carried out at companies, associations, government agencies, public institutions or local authority premises, in accordance with the conditions provided for by the Labour Code.

For pupils in their last year of lower secondary education preparing for vocational training (**troisième**
préparatoire à l'enseignement professionnel [17]), along with those in adapted general and vocational education sections (classes taking in pupils with major learning difficulties) and those benefiting from exemption schemes, it is incorporated into the placements in professional environments they have to carry out.

Where the sequence is carried out depends on the age of pupils concerned:

- Pupils aged 14 and over may carry out observation sequences in companies, associations, government agencies, public institutions or local authority premises (Article L. 4153-1 of the Labour Code)
- Pupils under 14 years of age cannot carry out observation sequences in establishments governed by private law, in compliance with Articles L. 4111-1 and L. 4153-1 of the Labour Code.

Article L. 4153-5 of the Labour Code [18], however, provides for an exception: they are authorised to carry out observation sequences “[...] in companies where only family members are employed, under the authority of the father, mother or tutor [...]”. Similarly, employers such as government agencies, public administrative institutions and local authorities can host pupils with no restrictions on age.

Sequences are organised within a legal framework defined by Articles D. 331-1 of the Education Code [19] and the Circular of 8 September 2003 [20] bearing on ways of hosting minors under 16 y/o in professional environments. Observation sequences may last for five consecutive days. It is the pupils themselves and their families who look for and choose observation sequence sites; they can seek help in doing so from educational teams.

Pupil supervision and monitoring must be specified in a compulsory convention signed by the educational institution and the host company or organisation.

**Legal framework**

**Observation sequences are governed by the Education Code, which specifies:**

- Observation sequence objectives: Article D. 332-14 of the Education Code.
- Ways of organising and carrying out observation sequences: Articles D. 331-1 to D. 331-4, D. 331-6, D. 331-8 and D. 331-9 [21]

**Traineeships and Guarantee forYouth**

Although higher education traineeships are intended for young graduates, young people with fewer opportunities and further removed from the labour market are targeted by a number of work/study schemes, such as professionalisation contracts, which are intended for beneficiaries of minimum social benefits with no required level of qualification. As regards the Guarantee forYouth scheme, which aims to integrate young people in highly precarious situations, professional placements of all possible kinds (traineeships and work/study programmes) are at its very heart. Young people benefiting from the scheme can also complete “periods of placements in professional settings” [22], which are neither traineeships nor work/study programmes. They aim to enable young people to acquaint themselves with a profession or activity sector, or confirm a
professional project.

During such periods, the young people concerned are not employed by the host organisations and therefore receive no payment from them.

Promoting traineeships and apprenticeships

Work/Study

In addition, a number of schemes assisting recruitment of apprentices have been made available to companies with a view to promoting apprenticeship and work/study programmes; they include for example:

- Exemptions from social contributions and aid provided by Agefiph [24], which works to foster professional integration of the disabled.

In February 2018, as part of the transformation of apprenticeship system, the Government conducted a new communication campaign "Start your story" which offers young apprentices to make video testimonials of their experiences.

This audiovisual campaign targeting young people consists of disseminating the portraits of young apprentices with a range of profiles and backgrounds. The campaign also seeks to change the image of apprenticeship in the eyes of young people and guidance professionals, as work/study courses have long been looked down on.

Among those involved in raising awareness of apprenticeship among young people, Local Missions play a key role, lending support to young people with fewer opportunities in their professional integration and orientating them towards such schemes as work/study and Youth Guarantee.

Traineeships

Traineeships incorporated into higher educational programmes have not been the subject of any special promotion, even though the law of 10 July 2014 bearing on development and supervision of traineeships and improvement of trainees’ status [13] also aims to develop “quality” [25] traineeships within training programmes.

Recognition of learning outcomes

All these schemes aim to help young people familiarise themselves with the world of work, as well as develop professional skills and make the utmost of learning outcomes.
Work/Study

The professionalisation contract aims at acquisition of a recognised professional qualification (a diploma or professional title listed in the National Directory of Professional Certifications, a certificate of professional qualification (CQP) or a qualification recognised in the classifications of a collective national convention).

Apprenticeship enables preparation for a secondary education vocational diploma (certificate of professional aptitude, baccalaureate or brevet professionnel (vocational certificate)), a higher education degree or a professional title listed in the National Directory of Professional Certifications (RNCP). Training and contract duration may vary from one to three years.

Higher education traineeships

In the context of higher education traineeships, validation of a (Bachelor’s or Master’s) degree usually depends on the quality of the vocational thesis (mémoire professionnelle) or traineeship report that students have to produce. Such theses have to result from students’ thoughts on their experience in professional environments. As a complement to examinations, they lead to validation of ECTS (European Credit Transfer and accumulation System) credits and consequent obtainment of their degrees. However, obtainment of ECTS credits through traineeships is by no means systematic and depends on institutions.

Sequence of observations in professional settings

As regards sequences of observations in professional settings carried out in the last year of lower secondary education, the pupils involved must write a report upon completion of their placements, which they hand in to their class teacher. They may also have to give an oral presentation during which they must share their professional experience. The report is marked, and the mark is included on the pupils’ end-of-term report cards.

Funding

Apprenticeships

The apprenticeship reform initiated in 2018, modifies its financing system, especially that of apprentice training centers (CFA). Training centers will be financed under the contract that is to say the number of apprentices received. In addition, the law creates the unique contribution to vocational training and work-study which brings together the contribution to vocational training and the apprenticeship tax.
European Structural and Investment Funds

France benefits from European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIFs). For the 2014-2020 period, the State was allocated €15.5 billion of structural funds (European Regional Development Fund_ERDF and European Social Fund_ESF), including 6.03 billion euros from the ESF.

Regional councils are responsible for the management of 35% of the national ESF budget, in particular for funding vocational training, apprenticeship and guidance. Regional programmes are mobilising €2 billion in ESF appropriations for the 2014-2020 period.


Traineeship

Funding of traineeships incorporated into higher educational programmes differs from that of apprenticeships: it is the bodies hosting the trainees that pay them a bonus. Although remuneration does not exceed the minimum hourly wage, it is exempt from social contributions on the part of the host organisation.

Since the end of 2013, several laws have brought major modifications to apprenticeships, particularly to the ways in which they are funded:

- Law no.2013-1278 of 29 December 2013 bearing on finances for 2014; [28]
- Law no.2014-288 of 5 March 2014 bearing on vocational training, employment and social democracy; [29]
- Law no.2014-1654 of 29 December 2014 bearing on finances for 2015, [31]

Quality assurance

There are no systems or schemes for qualitative evaluation of traineeships except evaluations and monitoring of the legality of a trainee's work conditions, which are carried out by inspectors from the Labour Inspectorate (inspection du travail), which is under the aegis of the ministry in charge of labour and employment.

Nonetheless, regions that coordinate and implement apprenticeship programmes and policies can create systems for evaluating the quality of apprenticeship schemes. Such is the case for the Île-de-France region, which launched the “work/study quality” (qualité de l’alternance) initiative, aiming to strengthen the capacities of schemes to support young apprentices, doing so via a range of projects such as:
• The **“ApprentiScènes” operation**, which enables 350 young people a year to advance and gain professional experience in company settings with the help of drama training and public performance of their sketches;

In addition, the 2018 the apprenticeship system reform modifies the **governance** of the apprenticeship training centers (CFA), particularly as regards the **quality of training offered**:

• CFA will have to disseminate information on the quality of their training including graduation rates, continuation of training courses and professional integration as a result of the training provided.
• The content of the published information by the CFA will be determined by order of the ministers responsible for vocational training and national education.
• The reform introduces a certification system for the apprenticeship training centers (CFA).

As of 1 January 2020, any new apprenticeship training center will need a quality certification to open. Providers who will work with CFA must be certified "quality" on the basis of criteria defined by decree in Council of State ([Article L6316-1 of the Labor Code](https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/eli/law/2018/4/10/L6316-1/text?oldid=394397111))[^1]. A national reference system setting the "quality" criteria will be determined by decree after the consultation of the national agency *France Compétences*, the creation of which is envisaged by the law "Freedom to choose one’s professional future" in order to "regulate the quality of training and their cost".