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Individualising training  
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the Compte Personnel de  
Formation (Personal  
Training Account – CPF)

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Formation (Personal Training Account – CPF)**

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## Abstract

*The establishment of the Compte Personnel de Formation (Personal Training Account – CPF) is a major milestone in the French continuing training system: it introduces a individualised scheme for financing training that is open to all economically active persons, and is fully transferable throughout the individual’s working life, from the time they enter the labour market until they retire. The CPF is currently the only example at international level of an individual learning account where individuals build up training entitlements over time.*

*The CPF was introduced in January 2015 as part of a thorough overhaul of the system for funding continuing training, and was reformed in 2018 in order to correct issues that had come to light, and more generally to strengthen the individual’s place in the system and to boost competition and the market. The aims of the CPF are (i) to reduce recorded inequalities in access to training to the detriment of those who are least qualified and in most precarious employment; (ii) to encourage personal autonomy in the take-up and choice of training; and (iii) to improve skills (and training provision). Thus the CPF funds only certificated courses for individuals who are likely to have to change their job – or employment status – several times during their working lives.*

*The data available for the period 2015-2018 show that, despite a rapid gain in momentum, utilisation of the CPF by the economically active has remained low and tends to replicate the unequal access to training seen under traditional training access schemes. In addition, the bulk of certifications obtained do not attest to the attainment of a specific level of skill (language tests, IT proficiency, personal skills assessments, driving licences and other accreditations).*

*The CPF is funded by a compulsory contribution from businesses with more than 10 employees; self-employed workers pay a flat-rate contribution to their training fund. Between 2014 and 2018, the CPF was credited in hours (24 hours per year for a full-time employee subject to a ceiling of 150 hours), with an increased entitlement since 2017 for the least skilled workers (48 hours/year and ceiling of 400 hours). The funding of training under the CPF therefore required a third party to take action to pay the training body: for employees this was a joint sectoral training fund, and for jobseekers it was Pôle Emploi (the French public employment service). The relevant third party was also required to supplement the basic amount credited in hours with additional funds. Since the Law of September 2018, the CPF has been credited in euros (EUR 500/year for a full-time employee, EUR 800/year for a low-skilled employee subject to ceilings of EUR 5 000 and EUR 8 000 respectively). The chief aim of the shift to euros was to provide individuals with greater clarity to help them understand the capital available to them, and to allow their demand to guide investment in training so as to to establish true competition in the training market.*

*While only certifications on the lists drawn up by the social partners were initially eligible for CPF funding – a complex system that was difficult for individuals to navigate – the “Future” Law of 2018 made all certifications eligible. It also finalises the digital application that enables individuals to mobilise their CPF to purchase training online in a fully autonomous manner, i.e. without having to go through a third party – an application that suffered from lack of ergonomics – until 2018. Until 2018, governance of the CPF, including the profusion of stakeholders, made utilising it a fairly complex matter. The Law*

*centralises funding and regulation of training by establishing a state-wide body with many competences: France Compétences. Thus it reduces the role of collective stakeholders and, in particular, of sectors of industry by relieving the joint sectoral training funds of their historic role as the collector-cum-funder of contributions for continuing training for employees.*

*In order to implement personal autonomy in the take-up of training, a new free and optional careers guidance service was introduced and made available in parallel to the CPF: the Conseil en Évolution Professionnelle (Career Development Counselling – CEP). This role was initially allotted, with no extra funding, to public employment service operators for the unemployed and to joint training funds for persons in work, before it was allocated funding and entrusted to the private sector under the Law of September 2018 for the latter. In practice, the roll-out of the CEP nationwide has been limited. In 2020, the budget allocated to the CEP for economically active persons in work should cater for a growing number of workers (+20%/year). However, it will still be necessary to reach those people, otherwise unequal participation in training is likely to grow.*

*The establishment of the CPF was also an opportunity to regulate the training market. As a result, the Law of March 2014 made significant progress in quality processes for the funders of training – these were particularly necessary because individuals are in a weaker negotiating position than the traditional purchasers of training. The recent shift to a single, compulsory certification for training providers who make claims on public funds has helped to remedy the issues that arose during the first phase of implementation of the CPF in terms of the profusion of certificates, labels and the mixed assurances they provided. In combination with the abolition of the lists, this should simplify the system for individuals. However, that is not enough to guarantee the quality of the training provided, which also depends on content and teaching methods. Since these factors are difficult to measure, especially for an individual, evaluations by public funders of training actions and their outcomes, and the manner in which those outcomes are communicated to the public, will remain crucial. Moreover, the shift to a single, compulsory certification is likely to undermine small training providers and thus deplete diversity in training provision.*

*Training undertaken between 2015 and 2018 was often short in duration. Genuine enhancement of skills requires either funding for lengthy training or a series of training episodes that allow the acquisition of modules which, when combined, lead to the award of a certificate or a diploma. The removal of the middlemen in mobilising the CPF is likely to make it more difficult to find co-funding for lengthy training. This makes it even more important to make the hitherto underused skills modules effective.*

*The CPF is an innovative scheme, but it is not the only channel for funding training for workers, and is part of a training eco-system in which it is yet to find its place. The Plan d'Investissement dans les Compétences (Skills Investment Plan – PIC) was launched at end-2017 and aims to raise the skills of one million young people and as many jobseekers again over five years. For employees, the Law of 5 September 2018 restates the employer's duty to ensure that employees are provided with the skills appropriate for their job, maintain their ability to perform a job notably in view of technological developments, and are redeployed in the event of job cuts. It also expands the definition of "training action" by including actions that can be conducted remotely or in the workplace.*

## Résumé

*La création du Compte personnel de formation (CPF) marque une étape importante pour le système français de formation continue en instituant un dispositif individualisé de financement de formations, ouvert pour tous les actifs, intégralement transférable tout au long de la vie professionnelle, de l'entrée sur le marché du travail à la retraite. Le CPF est actuellement le seul exemple au niveau international de compte individuel de formation sur lequel les individus accumulent des droits à la formation au cours du temps.*

*Mis en œuvre en janvier 2015 dans le cadre d'une réforme globale du système de financement de la formation continue, le CPF a été réformé en 2018 pour remédier à certains problèmes rencontrés et dans l'objectif plus général de renforcer la place de l'individu dans le système et de renforcer le libre jeu de la concurrence et du marché. Le CPF vise simultanément à i) réduire les inégalités observées d'accès à la formation au détriment des salariés les moins qualifiés et les plus précaires, ii) favoriser l'autonomie des personnes dans le recours et le choix des formations et iii) monter en qualification les personnes (et l'offre de formation). Ainsi, le CPF ne finance-t-il que des certifications pour des individus dont on considère qu'ils seront appelés à changer plusieurs fois d'emploi – voire de statut – au cours de leur vie professionnelle.*

*Les données disponibles sur la période 2015-2018 montrent que malgré une montée en charge rapide, l'utilisation du CPF par les actifs est restée limitée et qu'elle tend à reproduire les mêmes inégalités d'accès que les dispositifs d'accès à la formation traditionnels. En outre, les certifications acquises sont concentrées sur quelques certifications sans niveau de qualification (tests de langues, de bureautique, bilans de compétences, permis de conduire et autres habilitations).*

*Le CPF est financé par une contribution obligatoire des entreprises de plus de 10 salariés ; les travailleurs indépendants versent une contribution forfaitaire à leurs fonds de formation. De 2014 à 2018, le CPF était crédité en heures (24 heures par an pour un salarié à temps plein jusqu'à un plafond de 150 heures), avec une majoration pour les salariés les moins qualifiés introduite en 2017 (48h/an, et 400 heures maximum). Le financement d'une formation par le CPF nécessitait donc l'action d'un tiers pour payer l'organisme de formation, un fonds paritaire de la formation de branche pour les salariés, Pôle Emploi pour les demandeurs d'emploi ; ce tiers étant susceptible de compléter la dotation horaire de base par des financements supplémentaires. Depuis la loi de septembre 2018, le CPF est crédité en EUR (500 EUR/an pour un salarié à temps plein, 800 EUR/an pour un salarié peu qualifié, avec un plafond respectivement de 5 000 EUR et 8 000 EUR). Ce passage aux EUR est fait principalement afin d'offrir plus de lisibilité aux individus pour connaître le capital dont ils disposent et pour que leur demande oriente l'investissement en formation, de sorte à instaurer une véritable compétition sur le marché de la formation.*

*Alors que seules les certifications figurant sur les listes établies par les partenaires sociaux étaient initialement éligibles au CPF – système complexe et peu lisible par les individus – la loi « Avenir » de 2018 rend toutes les certifications éligibles. Elle finalise aussi l'application numérique permettant à un individu de mobiliser le CPF pour acheter une formation en ligne en toute autonomie, i.e. sans recours à un tiers – application peu ergonomique jusqu'en 2018. La gouvernance du CPF jusqu'en 2018, notamment la multiplicité des acteurs, rendait son utilisation assez compliquée. La loi centralise le*

*financement et la régulation de la formation par le biais de la création d'une agence étatique aux compétences multiples : France compétences. Elle réduit donc le rôle des acteurs collectifs, et en particulier des branches en retirant aux fonds paritaires de formation de branche leur rôle historique de collecteur et financeur de la formation continue des salariés.*

*Pour rendre effective l'autonomie des personnes dans le recours à la formation, un nouveau service d'orientation professionnelle a été institué parallèlement au CPF, optionnel et gratuit, à disposition des personnes: le CEP (Conseil en évolution professionnelle). La mission a d'abord été confiée, sans moyens supplémentaires, aux opérateurs du Service public de l'emploi pour les chômeurs et aux fonds paritaires pour la formation pour les actifs occupés, avant d'être financée et confiée au secteur privé pour ces derniers par la loi de septembre 2018. En pratique, le déploiement du CEP sur le territoire est demeuré restreint. Le budget alloué en 2020 pour le CEP des actifs occupés devrait servir un flux croissant de travailleurs (+20 %/an). Encore faudra-t-il les atteindre sous peine de voir s'aggraver les inégalités dans la participation à la formation.*

*La création du CPF a aussi été l'occasion de réguler le marché de la formation. La loi de mars 2014 a ainsi généré d'importantes avancées en matière de démarche qualité des financeurs de la formation – particulièrement nécessaires car les individus sont dans une position de négociation plus faible que les acheteurs traditionnels de formation. Le passage récent à une certification obligatoire et unique pour les organismes de formation (OF) prétendant à des financements publics permet de remédier aux problèmes observés pendant la première phase de mise en œuvre du CPF de la multiplication des certificats et labels et de l'hétérogénéité des garanties qu'elle impliquait. Combiné à la suppression des listes, cela devrait simplifier le système pour les individus. Toutefois, cela ne suffit pas à assurer la qualité des formations délivrées, qui dépend également de leur contenu et des méthodes pédagogiques. Ces facteurs étant difficilement mesurables, en particulier pour l'individu, l'évaluation des actions de formation et de leurs résultats par les financeurs publics et la façon dont ces résultats seront communiqués au public resteront donc centrales. Par ailleurs, le passage à une certification obligatoire et unique risque de mettre à mal les petits OF et d'assécher ainsi la diversité de l'offre de formation.*

*Les formations entreprises entre 2015 et 2018 étaient souvent de courte durée. Une véritable montée en qualification requiert ou le financement de formations longues ou l'enchaînement de formations permettant d'acquérir des modules/blocs de compétences qui, cumulés, permettent d'acquérir une certification ou un diplôme. La suppression des intermédiaires dans la mobilisation du CPF risque de rendre plus difficile de trouver des cofinancements pour les formations longues. Ceci rend d'autant plus important l'opérationnalisation des blocs de compétences, jusqu'ici peu utilisés.*

*Dispositif innovant, le CPF n'est cependant pas le seul canal de financement de la formation des travailleurs et s'inscrit dans un éco-système dans lequel il doit encore prendre sa place. Lancé fin 2017, le plan d'investissement dans les compétences (PIC) vise à monter en qualification un million de jeunes et autant de demandeurs d'emploi sur cinq ans. Du côté des salariés, la loi du 5 septembre 2018 réaffirme le devoir de l'employeur d'assurer l'adaptation des salariés à leur poste de travail, le maintien de leur capacité à occuper un emploi face aux évolutions technologiques notamment, et de reclassement en cas de suppression d'emploi. Elle élargit aussi la définition de l'action de formation en incluant des actions réalisées à distance ou en situation de travail.*

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## 1. The context of emergence of the *Compte Personnel de Formation* in France

The origins of the *Compte Personnel de Formation* (Personal Training Account – CPF) lie firstly in consistent evidence that had been accumulating from the 1980s onwards of deep-seated inequalities in access to training to the detriment of the least-skilled workers in the most precarious employment, and secondly in the growing trend for personalised training that emerged in the 2000s and has since then underpinned attempts to reform the institutional system of continuing education and training.

In France, the basis of the institutional system of continuing education and training are regarded as having been laid in 1971 under the Law on the Organisation of Continuing Vocational Training through Lifelong Learning (“the Delors Law”). The law stemmed from a national cross-sector agreement signed in 1970 and introduced the principle of vocational training during work hours, which led to a requirement for businesses to finance vocational training (calculated as a percentage of their payroll) and the mutualisation by each sector of the sums collected. In addition to training plans in the form of enterprise-initiated training, an employee-initiated training arrangement was established by the social partners, namely Individual Training Leave (*Congé Individuel de Formation* – CIF). This arrangement too was funded by business contributions, this time to Joint Bodies accredited for CIF Funding (“OPACIFs”), some of which were regional (“FONGECIFs”).

The legislator formally vested all employees with the same rights to training, regardless of their status.<sup>1</sup> For instance, a business training plan covered training measures for all its employees whatever their status. The subdivision of CIF into *CIF-CDD* (CIF for employees on fixed-term contracts) and *CIF-intérim* (CIF for agency staff) illustrated how the initial arrangement was formally adjusted to take account of the temporary status of employees in these categories.<sup>2</sup>

Since they were subject to an obligation to use their best endeavours rather than an obligation to achieve a specific result, businesses were always free to select people for training under the training plan according to their business needs (economic, strategic, etc.).

Over 30 years, this led to repeated documented disparities in employee access to training that showed that the most highly trained staff (executives, technical staff) were given access

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<sup>1</sup> The provisions covering public-sector employees are based on deferred implementation of the provisions covering private-sector employees (Perez, *La formation continue des agents de la fonction publique au miroir du secteur privé*, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Imbued with the aim of lifelong education and learning, CIF enabled employees not only to change their job or their profession, but also to explore cultural or social life, or to attain a higher level of qualification. In terms of conditions of access, the length of service that gave rise to entitlement for CIF-CDD employees took account of the past length of certain subsidised contracts; for CIF-intérim workers, time off as a result of sickness, an accident at work or other reasons was counted in addition to time at work. When providing a CDD employee with an employment contract, employers were required also to provide him with a personal training access form setting out information such as the right to CIF and the address of the OPACIF (for his occupation or region) relevant to the firm [this requirement was abolished under the Law of 5 September 2018 along with CIF]. Finally, the CIF entitlement extended beyond the length of the contract or the work performed at the firm where the employee concerned had made his request.

to training, and that large businesses provided more training opportunities than other businesses (see *Bilan Formation Emploi*, Insee, 2018; Annex). Additionally, CDD employees had less access to training than those in stable employment (permanent or public service staff): 39% and 52% of those groups respectively had undergone training over the preceding 12 months (cf. *Bilan Formation Emploi*, Insee 2018). The public sector provided better access to training opportunities than the private sector (62% compared to 45%; *idem*). The unequal access to training in businesses was not offset by employee-led CIF, which had only ever involved a small number of staff (around 33 000 requests for CIF accepted annually for permanent employees).<sup>3</sup>

**Agency staff** (*intérimaires*) were regarded as employees of the temporary employment agency. Like other businesses, the agencies were required to fund training in proportion to their size. Payments were made to a specific training fund for agency staff known as the FAF-TT. Agency staff expressly had access to the same arrangements as other employees, namely a Training Plan, Individual Training Leave (CIF), Personal Training Account (CPF), professional experience validation (VAE), vocational training contract, etc.), but the costings procedures and length of service requirements were different from those of CDD and permanent employees. The agency sector also drew up some specific arrangements to address urgent needs in professional areas such as logistics or the building trade (Belkacem & Lhotel, 2012). According to the Defis survey 2015 (CNEFP-Céreq), access to training by agency staff was around 32% over 18 months. However, that rate covered very different circumstances depending on how quickly staff moved from one job to the next and the profile of the agency staff themselves, i.e. those the agency sought to retain and whose skills it therefore nurtured, and the rest.<sup>4</sup>

Overall, **jobseekers** are less likely to access training than employed persons (44% compared to 59% in 2016; see Annex), but their average training period is longer (Gossiaux & Pommier, 2013). Training for jobseekers was devolved to the Regions in 1983; the state intervention took the form of employment policy (with greater expenditure during an economic crisis) and successive Action Plans, especially over the past decade (such as the *500 000 Additional Training Places Plan* in 2016 and the *Skills Investment Plan* in 2018). *Pôle Emploi* (the Public Employment Service in France) was the chief state operator in employment policy (and in conjunction with the Region, the main source of funding for jobseeker training). More recently, the social partners became co-funders of training for jobseekers, including through the *Fonds Paritaire de Sécurisation des Parcours Professionnelles* (Joint Fund for Safeguarding Career Paths – FPSPP).

<sup>3</sup> The number of funded CIF-CDD is even lower (around 9 000 annually), but when compared to the numbers of employees involved, CDD employees would appear to be proportionately better represented. Funding training programmes that are often lengthy (half were over 800 hours in 2017) and in skills (three-quarters led to a state diploma (diplôme d'État) or an approved qualification in 2017), the average bill for a CIF (including pay) was EUR 24 000. In practice, funding requests outstripped the funding capacity of the FONGECIF, and therefore access criteria were put in place discriminating in favour of less qualified staff (80% of recipients were manual or white-collar workers), training for shortage occupations, and retraining. An average of one application in every two was successful.

<sup>4</sup> A comparison of the number of agency staff receiving training by year from the FAF-TT alone (by way of vocational training and “individual” training – CIF, Skills Assessment, VAE, etc.) and the number of agency jobs (620 800 full-time equivalent posts in 2016) shows that access to training is very low at around 4% in 2016 (data from FAF-TT).

The quadripartite coordination of this group was deemed inadequate (Cour des comptes, 2018).

Scant attention is generally paid to **self-employed workers'** access to training. Non-employees' access to training is known to be less than that of employees (33% underwent training in 2016 compared to 51% of employees; source: Insee 2018, *op. cit.*). Farmers (training access rate of 30% in 2016) stand out in a diverse group comprising craftspeople, traders, entrepreneurs, of whom one-quarter underwent training in 2016. Information on access to training by self-employed workers is patchy, as stated in the Court of Auditors report as early as 2013. Among its recommendations, the Court noted the need to clarify the role of stakeholders in vocational training and to develop funding for training and support measures in their regard. Although since 2011 the self-employed have been required to pay a training contribution amounting to 0.2% of their annual turnover into a self-employed training fund (amounting to an estimated total contribution of EUR 10 billion in 2012), they have virtually zero access to training according to the IGF and the IGAS (*Évaluation du régime de l'auto-entrepreneur*, 2013).<sup>5</sup>

The issue of unequal access to training according to employment status is compounded by the fact that employment pathways now tend to be more episodic with more frequent spells of unemployment (Rouxel & Virely, 2012). The institutional training system was set up for an employment system where stable employment within one business was the norm, and as such it has come under some strain as a result of recent trends in workforce recruitment (employment on very short-term contracts, public promotion of self-employment, etc.).

In an environment where the European Union was promoting life-long learning in 2000,<sup>6</sup> “debates around reforming the system were fed by proposals to ‘uncouple’ training from employment and reattach it, at least in part, to each individual in the form of social drawing rights, such as a portable, collectively guaranteed, individual entitlement, and training passports” (Gadea & Perez, 2017). The aim of promoting individual entitlements was to address the difficulties in reducing unequal access to training and to “ensure that career paths are safeguarded”.

One of the initial steps was the establishment in 2004 of Personal Training Entitlement (DIF). This arrangement comprised a time credit (20 hours a year for 6 years) accrued by employees (permanent staff had to have been employed by the same company for at least one year) that could be mobilised for employee-led training subject to the employer's agreement (including whether the training took place outside work hours).<sup>7</sup> The DIF was funded by the employer (and chargeable against that employer's involvement in vocational

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<sup>5</sup> The *Blog des Auto-Entrepreneurs* (Self-Employed Workers' Blog) notes that the contribution gave entitlement to training costing between EUR 500 and EUR 1 250 per year depending on the worker's activity (and therefore the training fund to which he contributed): <https://www.evoportail.fr/blog/2014/10/24/auto-entrepreneurs-utilisez-vos-droits-a-la-formation>.

<sup>6</sup> The Lisbon Summit in March 2000 linked economic strategies to educational strategies and was followed by the publication of *A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (30 October 2000)* that would suffuse the reforms under way at national level.

<sup>7</sup> Some 70% of training undergone under the DIF was carried out during work time, and average duration was 26 hours per trainee (source: Annex to the Finance Bill 2013).

training<sup>8</sup>), and its aim was to encourage co-investment in training by creating a middle way between employer-led and employee-led training (via CIF). Although the DIF was originally non-transferable in the event of termination of an employment contract, it became “portable” under certain conditions<sup>9</sup> following the agreement of 11 January 2008 on labour market modernisation.

Employee mobilisation of DIF remained very low. In 2010 (in other words after 6 years in operation and maximum time accrual of 120 hours), the bulk of entitlements had not been utilised. In 2011, only 4.4% of employees had mobilised their DIF in the preceding 12 months, barely 2% in small businesses compared to 6% in large businesses (2 000 or more employees) (source: Annex to the Finance Bill 2013). Additionally, quality assessment of the DIF highlighted the differences in businesses’ strategies that largely led to employees’ (low) take up of the scheme; thus “some [businesses] sign up to the original idea behind the scheme by encouraging employees to take the lead. Others make training policy into a tool for minimising the impact of their financial contributions or charge measures that are similar or identical to training plan measures to the DIF” (Galtier, 2015). Take-up of the “individual entitlement” showed that, “although DIF aimed to establish greater equality between employee and employer as joint decision-makers, the employer-employee relationship proved to be weighted more heavily in the employer’s favour” (Galtier, 2015).

Thus the DIF foreshadowed the CPF by establishing training “capital”, initially for employees, that could be transferred in the event of contract termination. Despite its limited quantitative success, the principle of a personal training account was maintained and even extended to other categories of worker (public servants, self-employed workers). The aim was to make it the lynchpin of a new institutional system following a thorough overhaul, especially with regard to funding (Box 1.1).

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<sup>8</sup> The training levy has risen to 1.6% of the payroll for firms with 10 or more employees (compared to 1.5% previously) and 0.55% for firms with fewer than 10 employees (compared to 0.15%) (source: Annex to the Finance Bill, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> The training time accrued by an employee with an employer may be used following termination of the employment contract – excluding in the event of gross negligence, either during the period covered by unemployment insurance (with the case manager’s agreement), or with a new employer (and with his agreement) up to two years after recruitment. The hourly conversion rate was EUR 9.15.

### **Box 1.1. CPF – the core of funding reform for continuing vocational training for employees**

All businesses are generally under an obligation to participate in funding vocational training. They are required to pay all or part of their share to the OPCA (Accredited Joint Collection Bodies), bodies set up by the social partners that have state accreditation, to which they belong.

Businesses with 10 or more employees must pay a contribution known as an “obligation légale” (statutory obligation) equivalent to a share of their payroll depending on the size of the business. When the DIF was established in 2004 the contribution from businesses with 20 or more employees was set at 1.6% of the payroll. The contribution was then allocated to various items: training plan (requirement for businesses to spend at least 0.9% of their payroll on training or to pay the difference to their OPCA), CIF (0.2%), vocational training and DIF (0.5%).

The Law of 5 March 2014 establishing the CPF introduced a single contribution of 1% of the payroll for businesses with 10 or more employees. This contribution funded the CPF, the CIF, vocational training and the FPSPP (see table), and the training plan, but only for businesses with fewer than 300 employees. Thus the contribution to the FPSPP in part funds CPF for jobseekers: “The vocational training reform of 2013-2014 that introduced the CPF was a departure from traditional ring-fencing in vocational training, namely social contributions for employees and the state budget for jobseekers” (IGAS, 2017). Additionally, the Law removed the share of large businesses’ payroll payments from mutualised funds by way of finance for their training plans and sharply reduced the share from businesses with between 10 and 299 employees (the required share fell from 0.9% to 0.1% for businesses with between 50 and 299 employees).

The Law of 5 September 2018 further amended the financial rules and also changed the governance of the system. Businesses are required to pay a single contribution for continuing training and learning. The contribution rate for continuing training continues to be 0.55% of the payroll for businesses with fewer than 11 employees, and 1% for businesses with 11 or more employees (and 1.3% for employment agencies of this size). The contribution chiefly funds the CPF, Career Change Projects, Career Development Counselling for economically active persons in work (see below), jobseeker training, “skills development” (formerly the “training plan”) for businesses with fewer than 50 employees, in proportions that are laid down in a decree. CIF is abolished, and businesses that recruit employees on fixed-term contracts are required to pay a specific contribution (1% of the payroll for employees on fixed-term contracts). A decree published in the Official Journal of 26 December 2018 sets out the types of CDD that are outside the scope of this provision (including work-study contracts and seasonal contracts).

The contributions are to be paid to the URSSAF from 1 January 2022 rather than to the OPCA, whose role is substantively changed by the law. The sums collected will then be forwarded to *France Compétences* which will be responsible for allocating them to the *Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations* (a public-sector financial institution that manages the CPF); service providers with responsibility for career development advice for economically active persons in work; the State and the Regions; and OPCOs [skills operators – funding bodies replacing the OPCAs]. The allocation formula is likely to vary from one year to the next and ultimately is in the hands of the State. Indeed, *France Compétences* (a joint

commission) proposes the formula to the Ministry of Labour, and it is then formalised by ministerial decree.

The establishment of a requirement to fund training resulted in a tax form (known by its number, 24-83), and the data it contained was forwarded to the Ministry of Labour. Between 1971 and 2014, the data proved to be a valuable source of information on businesses' training expenditure. Monitoring the expenditure showed *inter alia* that the financial participation rate of businesses (which relates training expenditure, excluding health and safety, to a business' payroll) grew with the size of a business, and the largest contributed much more than their statutory obligation required them to (1.6% of the payroll for businesses with 20 or more employees). Since 2014, large businesses have not been required to account for their training expenditure: the tax form was abolished and along with it the source of statistical information on trends in businesses' training effort and its structure since 1971. Therefore, since 2014, it has not been possible to identify the direct expenditure by businesses on training their employees, namely their expenditure on purchasing training or conducting training in-house.

## 2. The CPF: an ambitious scheme

The CPF is a scheme that was set up by the social partners (national cross-sector agreements of 11 January and 14 December 2013) and established under the Law of 5 March 2014 on vocational training, employment and social democracy.

### 2.1. Objectives

The aim of the social partners, which is restated in the law, is a substantive reform of the institutional training system; the reform does much more than establish the Personal Training Account, even although that is indeed the flagship of the system, or even its linchpin. A consensus would appear to have grown up since 2004 around the idea that a personal account to hold at least an individual's entitlements was a good tool for training and other areas of policy. In 2017, the CPF was placed under the "umbrella" of the Personal Activity Account (Box 2.1).

#### Box 2.1. An even loftier ambition on standby: the Personal Activity Account

The Law of 8 August 2016 introduced the *Compte Personnel d'Activité* (Personal Activity Account, CPA). The aim of the account is, "through use of the entitlements set out therein, to enhance the account holder's autonomy and freedom to act and to safeguard his professional pathway by removing barriers to mobility" (Article L. 5151-1).

It has been in force since 1 January 2017 and acts as an "umbrella" for three pre-existing accounts: the CPF, the *Compte Personnel de Prévention de la Pénibilité* (Personal Hardship Prevention Account) and the *Compte d'Engagement Citoyen* (Civic Engagement Account).

The CPA was broader than the CPF (i.e. open to anyone over 16 years of age until their death), and, as a unifying account, made it possible to convert entitlements accrued in various circumstances (volunteering, heavy work) into training hours. It underlines the importance of one-to-one support at key times in an account holder's life; the CPA is also presented as the "means of providing comprehensive support" by "providing an overview of each person's situation" (*France Stratégie*, 2015). Since the CPA's scope was broader than that of the CPF, it would also require a broader vision of "career development advice" (*France Stratégie, op. cit.*, p. 131). The CPA also champions digital technology in accessing entitlements and means of "securing pathways" because the CPA had to be electronically accessible and designed for online use.

Even though the CPA has been set up (access to the CPF is via this site: <https://www.moncompteactivite.gouv.fr/cpa-public>), the public are largely unaware of it. The Macron Government that emerged from the 2017 election has not supported it, and the new wave transforming the institutional training system is focused on the CPF and system governance.

Under the CPF, the social partners agree to set up a "universal" account (one that is not dependent on a person's status) which is fully transferrable throughout an individual's working life, from the time they enter the labour market until they retire.

Between the time that it came into being on 1 January 2015 and 31 December 2018 when the new legislation entered into force, the CPF had three objectives:

- to encourage and implement personal autonomy in the take-up and choice of training;
- to improve people’s skill levels by channelling their choices (and training provision) towards qualifying training;
- to reduce inequalities in access to training.

The individual training account is therefore regarded as an important instrument (even a “major innovation”<sup>10</sup>) in encouraging access to training by individuals who are likely to have to change their job or their employment status (salaried employee, self-employed, unemployed, economically inactive, etc.) several times during their working lives. The transferability of the “entitlements” accrued with respect to those various statuses is therefore regarded as paramount.

In conjunction with transferability concerns, the *quid pro quo* for individuals’ autonomy in mobilising their accounts is that the accounts have to fund qualifying training leading to a certificate recognised on the labour market and that individuals could rely on in the event of a job change.

Finally, the explanatory statement on the Law of 5 March 2014 noted that the CPF is there “finally to provide the means of obtaining further training to those who have greatest need of it: less-skilled workers, jobseekers, employees of micro, small and medium-sized businesses, and employees in sectors and businesses that have been weakened by economic changes.”

## 2.2. Features of the CPF to December 2018

Under the Law of 5 March 2014, the CPF was designed to be a **personal, universal** account recording time in **hours** and automatically paid into (and topped up) by businesses (for employees) or a third party (Region, State, etc.), to fund courses delivering “**eligible**” **certificates** of the account holder’s choice. These features are examined in order below.

### 2.2.1. A personal, universal account<sup>11</sup>

It was open to anyone aged 16 or over who was participating in the labour force,<sup>12</sup> in other words whether employed or unemployed, regardless of their status (employed or otherwise), type of employer (private or public sector) or contract of employment (stable or temporary). It closed when the account holder retired.

<sup>10</sup> Explanatory statement on the Law of 5 March 2014.

<sup>11</sup> Article L. 6323-1 of the Law of 5 March 2014. “A personal training account shall be opened for each person over 16 years of age who is in employment, or seeking employment, or receiving support under a project that provides for vocational guidance or absorption into employment, or part of a sheltered employment institution [...]”

<sup>12</sup> In France, the legal age at which someone may enter the workforce is 16 years (school leaving age). By way of derogation, apprentices (from the age of 15) were covered by the CPF arrangements.

Note that the employment contract was the key to accessing training rights under the CPF. For instance, a jobseeker had rights only if he has worked as an employee and accrued rights as such. The account was portable, in other words the rights accrued could be mobilised outside the business where they had been acquired.

Account opening for employees and jobseekers took effect on 1 January 2015. The Law of 8 August 2016, the “Labour Law”<sup>13</sup> extended the CPF to public officials (civil servants) and self-employed workers (more specifically “the members of the professions and non-salaried occupations, their spouse co-workers and creative artists”) from 1 January 2018.

Compared to other individual training funding schemes, the CPF was universal in the sense that it was not restricted to/targeted at people who were, on the face of it, least likely to receive training. However, in order to respond to the stated objective to combat unequal access to training, the social partners made greater provision for certain “audiences”, a mechanism that can be described as “progressive universalism” (Perez, *Regard sur quelques expériences étrangères de 'comptes individuels de formation*, 2014).

### ***2.2.2. Credits recorded in numbers of hours***

In line with the previous scheme (the DIF), the decision was taken to retain the system of recording credits as training hours. Monetisation, which was not regarded as desirable by the trades unions, was a topic of lively debate, but was not ultimately adopted by members of parliament during the debate on the 2014 Law. A full-time employee<sup>14</sup> would be credited with 24 hours per year for five years, then with 12 hours per year up to a ceiling of 150 hours.<sup>15</sup> The account can be topped up, and hours start to be paid in again each time a withdrawal reduces the balance of the account to less than the ceiling, to encourage staff to undergo training regularly. The core number of hours credited was initially the same regardless of the account holder’s status (jobseeker, self-employed, etc.). But, from 1 January 2017 (following the “Labour Law” of August 2016), the least skilled workers received an enhanced credit equal to 48 hours per year (instead of 24) with a ceiling of 400 hours (instead of 150).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Law No. 2016-1088 on work, the modernisation of social dialogue and secure professional pathways, the “Labour Law”. <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000032983213&categorieLien=id>.

<sup>14</sup> The number of hours accrued was therefore proportional to time worked. Title III of the Law introduced the Personal Activity Account (see above).

<sup>15</sup> As of 1 January 2015, the old DIF entitlements accrued to end 2014 could be converted into hours and entered in the personal training account where they could be mobilised until 1 January 2021.

<sup>16</sup> More specifically, the target group is employees who have not obtained a level of training recognised by a Level V diploma (BEP or CAP), a registered professional qualification categorised at Level V in the *Répertoire National des Certifications Professionnelles* (National Registry of Professional Qualifications – RNCP) or a certification recognised by a sectoral national collective bargaining agreement (see Decree of 12 October 2016). This affects people who have a Level 1 or 2 qualification in the ISCED classification system, namely around 17% of the economically active population in 2017.

This “core” number of hours could itself be enhanced by adding hours or *abondements* (supplementary contributions) in specific circumstances (see below).

### 2.2.3. CPF funding: core and additional contributions

#### *Core funding*

Employees’ and jobseekers’ CPFs were paid into by businesses through the employers’ statutory contribution (Box 1.1). The hours accrued under the DIF could also be carried forward to the CPF by the account holder (until 31 December 2020).

Where the employers’ single contribution is concerned (1% of the payroll), a 0.2% share was allocated to funding the CPF for businesses with more than 10 employees (see Annex). It was generally paid to a joint sectoral body<sup>17</sup>, and mutualised. By mutualising funds, employees in small businesses (at least 10 employees) which were not required to make this contribution, could still fund training under the CPF.

Another share of the contribution (0.20%) was allocated to the FPSPP which was responsible *inter alia* for funding training for jobseekers through *Pôle Emploi* (the public employment service) and the Regions (the two main funders of training for this group).

For jobseekers who had not gained training entitlements under the previous scheme (the DIF), the social partners decided to fund the first 100 hours for training that mobilised the CPF. This provision became effective at the beginning of 2015 and made it possible for jobseekers with zero credit on 1 January 2015 to start using the CPF.

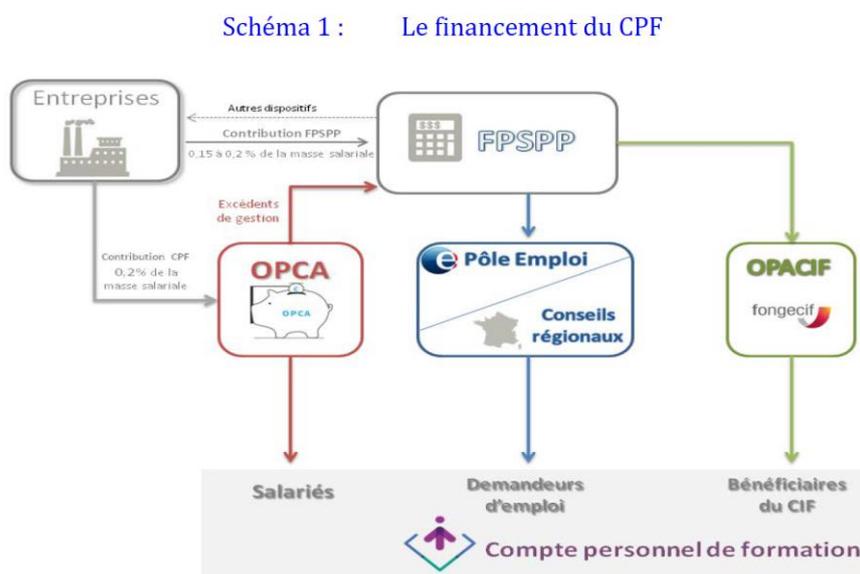
Finally, it was possible to participate in funding Individual Training Leave (CIF) using the hours accrued by way of the CPF. In this case, the funding for the CPF hours was provided by the FPSPP (not by the body responsible for collecting and funding CIF).

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The account holder is responsible for applying for the credit enhancement either through the CPF portal and the CPA platform, or through a careers development adviser.

<sup>17</sup> OPCA – Accredited Joint Collection Bodies. Between 2015 and 2019, there were 18 sectoral OPCAs and two cross-sector OPCAs whose role was to collect training funds from businesses that were not required to pay into a sectoral or industry-designated OPCA. Businesses could choose to retain the 0.2% rather than pay it into their OPCA. This occurred rarely in practice because the OPCAs provided their members with services and the opportunity to co-fund through mutualisation. On 1 April 2019, the OPCAs were replaced by the newly approved OPCOs – Skills Operators, which are responsible for supporting occupational training. The scope of the 11 OPCOs differs from that of the OPCAs in that the OPCOs bring industrial sectors together; the missions and resources allocated to them have also undergone change (see <https://travail-emploi.gouv.fr/ministere/acteurs/partenaires/opco>).

Figure 2.1. CPF funding to December 2019



Source: IGAS Report, 2017, p. 22.

Note: Translation: autres dispositifs, other schemes; contribution FPSPP 0.15 à 0.2% de la masse salariale, FPSPP contribution 0.15 to 0.2% of gross wage ; excédents de gestion, operating surpluses ; conseils régionaux, regional councils, salaries, employees, demandeurs d'emploi, jobseekers, bénéficiaires du CIF, beneficiaries of the CIF.

The **self-employed** also pay a contribution to a *Fonds d'Assurance Formation* (Training Insurance Fund – FAF), a mutualising body managed by employers' organisations that are representative of the profession(s) in question (e.g. the AGEFICE for entrepreneurs, non-salaried directors and their spouses, the FIF-PL for the professionals, the FAFCEA for craftspeople; self-employed entrepreneurs pay into the fund that best matches the activities they pursue). The contribution rate varies depending on the self-employment category; it averages 0.2% of either a reference standard, the annual ceiling for social security or one year's turnover, amounting to around EUR 100 per year for independent workers and around EUR 20 per year for self-employed entrepreneurs. Hours were credited to the CPF only once that contribution had been made. The number of hours accrued was identical to that of employees, namely 24 hours per year of carrying on the activity up to a maximum of 120 hours, then 12 hours per year of work subject to an overall ceiling of 150 hours. It was calculated on a *pro rata* basis for the contribution period. Self-employed workers with a low level of education do not receive a higher training credit. The CPF for the self-employed entered into force only on 1 January 2018.

#### *Supplementary and additional funding*

In addition to core funds, the law provided for the mobilisation of other funds to increase an individual's "training capital". Consequently, the hours credited could be increased in line with the use made of the account, or otherwise.

### *Supplementary funds unrelated to account usage*

Supplementary funding could be achieved under a sectoral or business agreement containing more favourable provisions than those laid down in law for those employees or training schemes deemed a matter of priority.<sup>18</sup>

Another case was that of a business (50+ employees) who would have failed to comply with the obligations incumbent upon it under the law in respect of the six-yearly survey summarising professional experience. The Law of 5 March 2014 required such a business to conduct a career interview every six years to establish whether the employee had undertaken at least one training course, successfully completed aspects of a certificated syllabus during training or through recognition of skills acquired on the job (*Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience*, VAE), or been awarded pay rises or career progression. If the employee had not been the subject of any of these measures (or had not had a career interview at all), the Law provided that 100 hours of supplementary training (130 hours for a part-time employee) were to be signed off by the employer and credited to the employee's CPF, thereby implying that the employer was subject to a requirement to ensure employees' employability.

### *Additional funding associated with training choice*

If, when mobilising the CPF, the duration of the anticipated training was greater than the number of hours in the account, the person concerned could request supplementary funding from various stakeholders depending on his employment circumstances and/or profile (skill level, disability, etc.) when starting the training.

Employees would most commonly seek additional funding from the following:

- their employer or the OPCA to which it makes payments; note that the CPF aimed to encourage co-investment in training by employer and employee, either by the employer covering some of the teaching cost or allowing the training to take place during working hours where the employee covered the teaching costs with his CPF;
- a fund collector with accreditation for managing CIF where the CPF is mobilised in addition to a CIF (the hours would then be paid by the FPSPP rather than by the OPACIF).

For a jobseeker:

- the Region or *Pôle Emploi* depending on the nature of the training, the Region's stated training priorities (e.g. shortage occupations) and the jobseeker's profile. For instance, the supplementary funding for jobseekers aged 50-55 was changed to 500 hours under the UNEDIC<sup>19</sup> Agreement with the social partners in March 2017 (IGAS, 2017, p. 20).

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<sup>18</sup> For example, the electric and gas industry sector provided for a supplementary contribution in an agreement for CPFs mobilised entirely or partially outside working time and for specific employees: the low-skilled, the disabled, those who had not taken any training in the firm for four years (Pluricité-Itinéré, 2018).

<sup>19</sup> National Professional Union for Employment in Industry and Trade, which collects the unemployment social contributions.

For a disabled worker: the AGEFIPH (Association for the Management of Funds for the Vocational Integration of Disabled People).

Supplementary funding for the self-employed could come from Chambers of Trade and Crafts or the FAFs responsible for managing mutualised funds.

Whatever their status, the persons concerned could also be called upon to finance the balance of the training from their own pocket.<sup>20</sup>

#### **2.2.4. Procedures for using an account**

##### *An account activated by the account holder*

An account is opened *automatically* for employees and for jobseekers registered with *Pôle Emploi*. However, in order to use the hours in the account, the holder had to “activate it by visiting the dedicated website: [moncompteformation.gouv.fr](http://moncompteformation.gouv.fr). Activation required the account holder to identify himself with his social security number and to have (or set up) an e-mail address. Once activated, the pages accessible to the account holder allowed him to see his training entitlement, the hours credited by way of the CPF (and a history of its use, if any), to perform searches for jobs and training, and to set up a “training file” (from selecting the training to undergoing it via messaging funders). The entire process could therefore be conducted electronically.

##### *The CPF could be mobilised **autonomously** by the account holder...*

...provided that the training was conducted **outside working hours** and that the **time credited to the account was sufficient to cover the training**.

An employee who wished to undergo training by mobilising his CPF was not required to inform his employer where the training takes place outside working hours. He then approached his OPCA to fund the training (to convert his credited hours into euros to pay the training body). This type of mobilisation was described as “autonomous”.

An employee needed the agreement of his employer in order to mobilise his CPF to undergo training entirely or partly during working hours.

If the training was at the employer’s initiative and the employer asked/suggested that the employee should mobilise his CPF, the law recalled that “the account may be mobilised only with the account holder’s express agreement. A refusal by the account holder to mobilise the account shall not constitute misconduct.” (Article L. 6323-2.)

In any event, this type of broadly “autonomous” mobilisation necessitated involving an intermediary (for employees, this was the OPCA) to convert the hours of credit into euros with which to pay the training provider. The conversion rate was therefore in the hands of the intermediary and varied by sector, the timing of the training request,<sup>21</sup> and the strategic importance of the training to the sector concerned. For instance, the average cost of

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<sup>20</sup> In 2015, French households spent EUR 1.4 billion on funding continuing training. This represented 5.6% of spending on training in France in 2015 (excluding direct expenditure by firms). Over half the sum (62%) spent by households was in respect of private-sector employees and close to a quarter (22%) was in respect of jobseekers (Mesnard, 2018).

<sup>21</sup> The OPCAs tended to be more generous when the scheme was fairly new and reduced their costings coverage as the momentum rose.

covering one hour's eligible training under the CPF was EUR 42 in 2017 for an employee, but ranged between EUR 15-EUR 80 (IGAS, 2017).

For jobseekers, no approval for training was required from *Pôle Emploi* provided that there were enough hours of credit in the CPF and therefore no need for a supplementary contribution. Nonetheless, a *Pôle Emploi* adviser had to be consulted to convert the hours into a means of payment for the training body. The conversion rate was EUR 9 per hour of training.<sup>22</sup> If co-funding was required (to cover teaching costs) and/or by way of financial assistance during training, a discussion with the *Pôle Emploi* adviser was required. The discussion could lead to choosing training that had been pre-purchased by *Pôle Emploi* (as part of group purchasing arrangements). This raises the issue of the jobseeker's effective autonomy, even though the jobseeker concerned was required formally to give consent to using his CPF.

### *Funding training that involved eligible certifications*

The CPF was designed to fund transferable training that was recognised on the labour market and so promote career mobility and/or (re)integration into employment. As evidence, the training (or part of it, a "skills package") was required in most cases to involve certification. The certification was recognition by the authorities (and the social partners) that the training was eligible for CPF funding. In other words, the only training likely to be funded by the CPF was training that involved "certification".

Between 2015 and 2018, the social partners sought to restrict the scope of accessible certification, and this led to three lists of eligible certificated courses at different levels:

- National: the cross-sector list drawn up by the *Comité Paritaire Interprofessionnel National pour l'Emploi et la Formation* (National Cross-Sector Joint Committee for Employment and Training – COPANEF)<sup>23</sup> contained 12 736 certificated courses at 1 January 2016;
- Regional: the *Comités Paritaires Interprofessionnels Régionaux pour l'Emploi et la Formation* (Regional Cross-Sector Joint Committees for Employment and Training – COPAREFs) drew up 46 regional lists;
- Sectors (138 lists drawn up by the social partners at sector level, all of whom were involved in CPNEs).

<sup>22</sup> "The EUR 9 rate was regarded as poor both by *Pôle Emploi* management and the career development advisers interviewed by the team: most eligible training, apart from training programmes for skilled workers wanting to start up or take over a business, cost more than conversion at the standard rate could provide." (IGAS, 2017).

<sup>23</sup> Under the Law of 5 March 2014, the COPANEF is responsible for laying down policy guidance for the social partners in matters of training and employment. It is a joint body comprising representatives of employee trade union organisations and employers' organisations that are representative at national and cross-sectoral levels. The COPAREFs are the COPANEF's regional tier. The *Commission Paritaire Nationale de l'Emploi* (National Joint Employment Commission – CPNE) is a joint body within a particular sector of industry. It is responsible for promoting occupational training in line with developments in employment and the skills requirements of the sector. For further information on these bodies, please consult: <https://www.paritarisme-emploi-formation.fr>.

These three levels constituted the “three complementary legitimacies ” to identify relevant training (CNEFOP, 2016<sub>[10]</sub>).

Once that work had been completed, the social partners at the three levels selected the following as eligible certificated training:

- Training backed by certification entered in the RNCP;<sup>24</sup>
- “The certificates and accreditations for interdisciplinary skills in the workplace (...)”<sup>25</sup> (Education Code, Article L335.6) recorded in the Register held by the RNCP;
- The *Certificats de Qualification Professionnelle* (Professional Qualification Certificates – CQP) that were awarded by sectors and designed to meet the specific needs of businesses in the sector concerned;<sup>26</sup>
- Training “that helps to provide access to qualification to jobseekers funded by the Regions”, *Pôle Emploi* or the AGEFIPH.

For the least skilled, the Law of 5 March 2014 wanted the CPF to be able to fund the acquisition of a “core body of knowledge and vocational skills”, dubbed the CléA, which the social partners helped to identify ([Decree No. 2015-172 of 13 February 2015](#)). This certificated course involved seven modules covering the basic skills (French, arithmetic, ICT, etc.),<sup>27</sup> and each individual had five years to validate them all. Until 2018, it was binding on employers. In other words, an employer could not decide against an employee using his CPF to receive training in these core modules *during working time*.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> The RNCP records diplomas and qualifications for professional purposes, and categorises them by sector and level. The diplomas and qualifications for professional purposes awarded in the name of the State are automatically entered in the RNCP after considering the opinions of consultative bodies on which employers’ and employees’ organisations sit, where such bodies exist. For example, courses run by the *Association pour la Formation Professionnelle des Adultes* (Association for Adult Vocational Training – AFPA) lead to diplomas and qualifications for professional purposes that are awarded by the Ministry of Labour. Other diplomas and qualifications for professional purposes can be entered on the Register at the request of the bodies that established them, after considering the opinion of the *Commission Nationale de la Certification Professionnelle* (National Commission for Vocational Certification – CNCP) (Article L335-6 of the Education Code).

<sup>25</sup> These certifications attest to professional expertise (not a level of skill). They follow on from a process for checking the expertise in question, are proposed by a legitimate body and evidenced in a document. The Register is now known as the “Specific Register”.

<sup>26</sup> They are created and awarded by the CPNEs in one or more professional sectors; they may be recorded in the RNCP (following consideration by and on the advice of the CNCP) or on the Register alone.

<sup>27</sup> Communication in French, use of the basic rules of arithmetic and mathematical reasoning, use of the commonly used digital information and communications skills; ability to work within rules laid down for team-working; ability to work independently and attain a personal objective; ability to learn to undertake lifelong learning; skill in body movements and body stance and compliance with health and safety and basic environmental rules ([Decree No. 2015-172 of 13 February 2015](#)). <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/eli/decret/2015/2/13/ETSD1431206D/jo/texte>.

<sup>28</sup> This ceased to be possible as of 1 January 2018: employee access to the CléA is now subject to the same rules as other certification if the employee wants to train during his working time.

Under the Labour Law of 8 August 2016, the range of training eligible under the CPF was extended. Funding could also be provided for: support for VAE, Skills Assessment, training for people starting or taking over a business, and even preparation for a driving licence provided *inter alia* that it will help in implementing a job-related plan.<sup>29</sup>

Training that is “compulsory” by law<sup>30</sup> such as CACES (*Certificat d’Aptitude à la Conduite en Sécurité* – Certificate of Proficiency in Operating Machinery) has also become eligible (the certificate is valid for a specific period of time; eligibility was for the award of the initial certificate, not for its renewal). The inclusion on regional lists (for jobseekers) and some sector lists (for employees) was the topic of lively debate in which some speakers warned of a risk of the taxpayer paying for training that was an employer’s responsibility.<sup>31</sup>

These additions were significant in that they would appear to be in response to a short-term employability objective rather than the aim of career development and “skills enhancement”. There was also lively debate among the social partners concerning access to the certifications entered on the Register (BULATS, TOEIC, etc.), because the fact that they were eligible presupposed the abandonment of the qualifying training objective.

The purpose of the lists was mixed. The requirement for “certification” served the purpose of training transferability or quality. At the same time, the lists represented a compromise between the social partners who were, to some extent, funding the CPF. For instance, not all “certifications” were made CPF-eligible: “these lists aim to make choices” (CNEFOP, 2016). They were “a robust riposte to the freedom afforded to the account holder to exercise his training entitlement” (IGAS, 2017).

### 2.3. The CPF under the new reform of the institutional continuing training system

#### 2.3.1. The CPF in a overhauled institutional environment

The Presidential election of May 2017 resulted in a new government. The Minister for Labour, Muriel Pénicaud, was given responsibility for a package of labour market reforms; these included reform of vocational training, which was presented as a necessary “big

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<sup>29</sup> The social partners were not consulted and were apparently not in favour of this funding (IGAS, 2017). In addition to the contribution to implementing a job-related project, preparation for a class B licence (car, van, 2-wheels only) must take place at an accredited school that has training body status (Law of 27 January 2017).

<sup>30</sup> Employers are required to provide any compulsory training. Two types of compulsory training: health and safety training, and other accreditations required by law. In the former case (health and safety), training has always unequivocally been at the employer’s expense and was not recorded under a tax funding liability. In the latter case (such as CACES, electrical accreditation, etc.), funding for training is not so clear-cut: some employers take the view that employees should at least bear a share of the cost as the training is often transferrable to other firms (Beraud, 2016)). In fact, although all compulsory training is the employer’s responsibility, the automatic entry of CACES and other accreditations into the Specific Register *de facto* allows the employee (or jobseeker) to fund them with his CPF.

<sup>31</sup> Others have noted that the certified nature of this training ensures that the skills acquired by the employee are transferable and are recognised outside the firm, thus promoting employee mobility and increasing employability in the event that the employee loses his job. This debate has now been settled: CACES are accessible under the CPF because they are recorded in the Specific Register (see Section 2.3.2 above).

bang”.<sup>32</sup> The social partners were again invited to take part in a packed schedule of negotiations in autumn 2017 (a draft law was expected in spring 2018) covering several areas: the right to training and support; management of professional pathways; day-release training and business; certification, evaluation and quality; and the overall funding and governance of the system.

A new cross-sector national agreement was signed on 22 February 2018 reflecting the intention to continue with the CPF by making it easier to mobilise, particularly in respect of the list system and provision of better support. The agreement provides for a beefed-up CPF (more hours of credit), the abolition of lists of “eligible” training, and the replacement of CIF with a “Changeover CPF”. In the wake of the agreement, a preliminary draft bill was announced in March 2018 introducing two major changes that were not viewed as desirable by the social actors: monetisation of the CPF and abolition of the involvement of intermediaries when mobilising the CPF (or *désintermédiation* – removing the middleman).

The draft law also changed the system’s funding and governance by providing for the URSSAF (*Unions de Recouvrement des Cotisations de Sécurité Sociale* – Agencies for the Collection of Social Security and Family Allowance Contributions<sup>33</sup>), taking over from the OPCA, to collect firms contributions (see also Box 1). Now, relieved of the duty to collect contributions,<sup>34</sup> the purpose of the OPCAs was to become “skills operators” (OPCOs) with responsibility for the outlook for jobs, employment and skills, and support for businesses and sectors of industry. A new agency, dubbed *France Compétences* (Skills Agency, France) replaced the existing joint committees (CNEFOP, FPSPP and CNCP) and was given responsibility for regulating the continuing vocational training system and validating the quality of the training provided (Box 2.2).

The draft law was presented in April 2018, debated in the National Assembly in June 2018 and adopted by Parliament on 1 August 2018. **Law No. 2018-771 of 5 September 2018 “on the freedom to choose one’s professional future”**<sup>35</sup> was then promulgated. The institutional fabric would appear to have been significantly altered by this reform, under which historic stakeholders disappeared and new operators emerged.

Following the abolition of CIF and the loss of their accreditation for the provision of professional careers advice, the FONGECIFs and the OPACIFs disappeared as such, but not before providing services in 2019, the year of transition to the new system. The Law established new structures: *Commissions Paritaires Interprofessionnelles Régionales* (Regional Cross-Sector Joint Committees – CPIRs) with responsibility for managing the scheme that would replace CIF, the *Projet de Transition Professionnelle* (Career Change Project – PTP) (cf. above). The CPIRs decided collectively to call themselves *Association Transition Pro* (ATPro) in all regions.

<sup>32</sup> The press broadly reflected this; see e.g. <https://www.latribune.fr/economie/france/le-big-bang-de-penicaud-sur-la-reforme-de-la-formation-professionnelle-770625.html>.

<sup>33</sup> These are private-sector bodies with a public service mission under the “collection” arm of the general social security system.

<sup>34</sup> They have accreditation to collect collectively agreed contributions (i.e. those decided upon by the social partners) and voluntary firm contributions.

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/eli/loi/2018/9/5/MTRX1808061L/jo/texte>.

**Box 2.2. *France Compétences*: a national government agency with responsibility for regulating and funding vocational training and apprenticeship**

Established on 1 January 2019, *France Compétences* is under the supervision of the Minister for Vocational Training. As a key body in training-related governance and funding its role is as follows:

- to allocate mutualised funds to the various vocational training stakeholders (OPCO, Region, CDC, CPIR, State for jobseeker training) based on ranges laid down by decree (Box 1.1);
- to regulate the quality of training;
- to make recommendations on training costs, rules for covering costings and access;
- to ensure the proper implementation of the vocational training reforms;
- to draw up the list of certifications entered in the RNCP and the Specific Register.

Moreover, in conjunction with industry, it is involved in constructing professional qualifications and diplomas. This includes establishing and ensuring the relevance of the professional certifications and other accreditations.

*France Compétences* organises and funds Career Development Counselling (CEP).

A three-year agreement on objectives and performance is to be entered into by the State and *France Compétences*. It will set out the objectives assigned to the institution, and the arrangements for funding and carrying out its missions.

*France Compétences* has a quadripartite governance structure comprising the State, Regions, employees' and employers' organisations and experts. The composition of the board, the appointment of the director-general and the chair of the board are made by an order of the Minister for Labour.

The reform of vocational training undertaken by the government that emerged from the May 2017 elections was regarded as one aspect of an “overhaul of the French social model”,<sup>36</sup> the aims of which included strengthening the individual’s place in the system, as encapsulated in the title of the law. It was designed to be one stage on from the Labour Orders (“on enhanced social dialogue”; September 2017) and ahead of the reform to unemployment insurance in respect of which negotiations opened in September 2018.

### **2.3.2. *The CPF after the Law of 5 September 2018***

*Monetise, get rid of the middleman, dematerialise... to simplify access to training*

The “overhauled” CPF differs from the version that was in force from 2014 in several respects:

- The unit of account is now the **euro** (since 1 January 2019).

<sup>36</sup> See the Explanatory Statement to the Law: <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichLoiPreparation.do?idDocument=JORFDOLE000036847202&type=general&typeLoi=proj&legislature=15>.

The explanatory statement to the Law of 5 September 2018 states that monetisation of the CPF should help to make it easier to mobilise the CPF by “providing economically active persons with greater clarity so that they can understand the capital available to them”. Other arguments were also put forward: monetisation would be better suited to new teaching methods, especially distance-training, which would require more flat-rate modes of funding. It would make entitlements more portable in the event of a change in activity status or sector of work. As training hours were valued differently depending on a person’s status (employee or jobseeker; among employees according to the OPCA; according to socio-professional categories as the average cost of one hour’s training for an executive was more expensive than for a manual worker or employee, etc.), the CPF denominated in hours was probably fairly non-redistributive. Finally, the hours-denominated account was criticised for giving rise to supply-side screening by training bodies based on the costings coverage rate. However, the main justification would appear to lie in the statement on the promotion of individual initiative and freedom of choice such that “demand” (on the part of individuals) should be the guiding light for investment in training, rather than “supply” (training bodies), and to establish true competition among the training bodies to the benefit of the training account holders. For instance, monetisation encourages the removal of middlemen that had previously been crucial to converting hours into euros.<sup>37</sup>

From 1 January 2019, the hours accrued under the DIF<sup>38</sup> and the CPF were converted at a rate set by decree of EUR 15 per hour. From 1 January 2020, each **worker has EUR 500 per year in his CPF to pay for training, and the least skilled have EUR 800** up to a ceiling of EUR 5 000 and EUR 8 000 respectively over 10 years. Monetisation has led to an increase in the value of jobseekers’ initial capital, although note that greater equity here comes through a *de facto* cut in the value of “training capital” for some employees.

- **Abolition of the “list system”**: derided because of their large number and lack of clarity (IGAS, 2017), the “lists” were abolished. Now all eligible certified training (i.e. entered on the RNCP and the Specific Register) are entered on a single list managed by *France Compétences*.<sup>39</sup> The Law confirms the eligibility of measures that do not traditionally fall under the umbrella of “training”: skills assessments,

<sup>37</sup> The three employers’ and five employees’ organisations objected to monetisation and made various arguments against it (see <https://www.cpformation.com/monetisation-cpf-avis-syndicats>), but probably because it was likely to open the way for removing the middleman. According to CNEFOP, one of the reasons in favour of a CPF denominated in hours was “to ensure maximum flexibility in the management of earmarked funding envelopes (0.2% OPCA and FPSPP) and thereby retain some kind of relationship between projects and jobs because the actual differences in the hourly cost of training varies significantly depending on the training’s purpose. Clearly the hour-denominated CPF gave the OPCAs a key role in price regulation and quality control of the training” (CNEFOP, 2017, *Rapport sur le suivi et la mise en œuvre du CEP et du CPF*, p. 45).

<sup>38</sup> Unused training hours accrued under the DIF can still be credited to the CPF provided they are carried forward before 31 December 2020.

<sup>39</sup> As part of this mission, *France Compétences* considers requests for entry on the RNCP and the RS on the basis of criteria set out under [the Decree of 18 December 2018](#) on the conditions for entry of professional certificates and certificates and accreditations in the national registers. See <http://www.cncp.gouv.fr>.

measures to validate experience gained in the workplace, preparation for driving tests, training to support and advise people to achieve their goal of starting or taking over a business.

### *Creation of a Career Change Project*

Apart from simpler, less mediated access, the legislator's intention was to make the CPF "a **single personal entitlement in the hands of individuals** taking an approach based on direct ownership, in other words, an autonomous approach with no compulsory middleman" (extract from the impact study; our highlighting). Individual Training Leave (CIF), an employee-led scheme established in 1971, was abolished.

The Law established the Career Change Project (*Projet de Transition Professionnelle* initially known as "*CPF de transition -- Changeover CPF*") intended to support plans to change trade or profession, in other words retraining.

Access to this arrangement is subject to conditions involving length of time in the labour market,<sup>40</sup> except for disabled employees and people made redundant for economic reasons or lack of skills. Together with failure to comply with the deadline for submitting a request to the employer, those are the only grounds on which an employer may refuse leave.<sup>41</sup>

The Law provides for the requester to undergo a "posting prior to taking up training in order to identify existing skills and consequently adjust the length of the proposed training pathway"; the prior posting must be made by the nominated training body (and before knowing whether the training project has been funded). The aim is to reduce the length of the training and therefore its cost (in particular by reducing the time during which the employee must be remunerated).<sup>42</sup> Decree No. 2018-1332 of 28 December 2018 on the use of the Personal Training Account as part of a Career Change Project states: "After the prior posting, a document attached to the funding request shall identify the employee's existing skills and put forward a training pathway that is personally tailored in its content and duration to the training identified as necessary in order to implement the Career Change Project. It must include an estimate approved by the employee setting out the cost and content of the proposed training measure.

The project is then sent to a new stakeholder for approval: the Regional Cross-Sector Joint Committee (CPIR). The CPIRs are accredited by the State and are responsible for considering the request, the relevance of the training project, and determining how well it meets local labour market needs. The CPIRs (subsequently renamed *Association Transition*

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<sup>40</sup> The conditions in question are the same as those governing access to CIF-permanent employees and CIF-CDD: 24 months in the workforce including 12 months in the same firm, or 24 months in the workforce over the preceding 5 years, including 4 months on a CDD during the preceding 12 months.

<sup>41</sup> By contrast, an employer may defer leave, especially if there are several requests to take leave at the same time. For instance, no more than 2% of staff can be on CTP at the same time in a firm with more than 100 employees; the figure is no more than one employee at a time for smaller firms. The Decree sets out the criteria for drawing up a waiting list (skills level, length of service, etc.).

<sup>42</sup> The CEP is confirmed, and funding will be allocated (through a withdrawal from the contributions made by firms to the funds collected by the URSSAFF, followed by *France Compétences*).

*Pro*) investigate the request for funding and give the go-ahead for the project and the funding; the FONGECIFs will perform this role until no later than the end of 2019.<sup>43</sup>

The CPIR funds the training costs (teaching costs, associated costs and the employee's pay). A share of the funding is provided from business contributions as determined each year by *France Compétences*.<sup>44</sup> Between 2014 and 2018, the FONGECIFs could ask the individual concerned to mobilise the hours accrued under his CPF; in that case, they were paid for by the FPSPP. In practice, this could lead to the selection of the individuals with a high number of hours in credit, as it mitigated the costs covered by the FONGECIFs. Since the "Future" Law, funding for training has been provided in full by the CPIR, and the CPF counter has been reset to zero.

The question that was left hanging until the publication of the Decree of 28 December 2018 was the crucial matter of payment of the **wages of an employee** while undergoing training under the Changeover CPF.<sup>45</sup> Ultimately, the law restated the circumstances laid down under CIF. It provides for an employee on a Career Change Project to have the status of professional skills trainee throughout the training period.<sup>46</sup> He has the right to remuneration paid by the employer and reimbursed by the CPIR (where the training is carried out during working time), or directly by the CPIR if the training commences after the end of his work contract (but within six months of its expiry). The amount of remuneration has regard to the benchmark average wage for the account holder<sup>47</sup> and the duration of the training (Table 2.1).

**Table 2.1. Calculation of remuneration during career change leave**

Reference salary (SR)	Duration of training	
	< a year or < 1200 hours	> a year or > 1200 hours
< 2 x minimum wage (SMIC)	100% of SR	100% of SR beyond one year
> 2 x minimum wage (SMIC)	90% of SR Floor: 2 x SMIC	60% of SR beyond one year Floor: 2 x SMIC

Source: Ministry of Labour website. Updated on 12 April 2019 and viewed on 13 May 2019.

<sup>43</sup> Just as the changeover CPF resembles CIF (without being exactly the same), the CPIRs tend to be regarded as a reincarnation of the FONGECIFs but without the same powers. For instance, the "advice" aspect of the FONGECIFs (and the OPACIFs) for employees has been removed. In January 2020 at the latest, "economically active persons in work, excluding public officials", will be advised by new operators selected at regional level following hitherto unpublished specifications adopted by the Minister for Labour. The four other "historic actors", namely the APEC, *Cap Emploi*, Local Missions and *Pôle Emploi* will continue to provide advice to specific groups: executives, the disabled, young people and jobseekers.

<sup>44</sup> In 2019, 39% of funds collected by way of the statutory contribution were allocated to career changes; in 2020, the figure was 16%.

<sup>45</sup> Under CIF, this cost was covered in full by FONGECIF and amounted to around EUR 27 000 per year of training.

<sup>46</sup> Under CIF, the requester is deemed to be on **special leave** when taking some or all of the training during his working time; in other words, the duration of the career change project cannot be deducted from annual leave and is regarded as being a period of work.

<sup>47</sup> The benchmark wage is calculated based on the wage earned over the 12 previous months for a permanent employee, or the past four months for a CDD employee.

Overall, the Career Change Project is not very far removed from CIF in terms of its means of access and operation. For instance, the Law of 5 September 2018 retains the requirement for the employee's absence to be authorised (i.e. suspension of the work contract) and for the employee to receive a minimum level of remuneration during the training period. The abolition of CIF and the joint bodies (FONGECIF, OPACIF) that managed it must therefore be questioned.<sup>48</sup> Whereas the abolition of CIF could, in part, be justified by the low number of beneficiaries, are the features of the Career Change Project really such that workers will mobilise it more? It is not clear that they are.

For instance, the Career Change Project imposes a dual restriction on the training funded. Although designed as a *means of accessing* CPF-eligible training, it funds only the certified courses that fall under that umbrella. In addition, funding is restricted to retraining projects (with no length of service requirement for employees laid off for economic reasons or through lack of skills), whereas, under CIF, it was also possible to fund training projects to supplement current skills.

Furthermore, the issue of funding for lengthy (and therefore most often costly<sup>49</sup>) courses has been raised. The provisional budget of *France Compétences* for 2020 provides for income of EUR 496 million to the ATPro (formerly CPIR), which could be the equivalent of 17 800 Career Change Projects (PTPs); compared to 44 600 PTPs undertaken in 2018. The average unit cost of a PTP may well be higher because the disappearance of sectoral OPACIFs has led ATPro to fund lengthy pathways (such as healthcare assistant or nurse) that were uncommon under CIF delivered by the FONGECIFs. In such cases, extra funding may be required. Who might support an individual to set up the funding to pay for his project? Is this a matter for the professional careers advice service<sup>50</sup> (which, on the face of it, is ill-equipped for this task) or for the CPIR (which will intervene only to validate a project, according to the literature)? If this task is too arduous, it risks becoming a barrier to using the scheme.

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<sup>48</sup> According to J.M. Luttringer, a jurist and expert on training policy and law, it is likely that its abolition is a “side effect” of the abolition of the role of middle man played by the OPCAs. The decision to do this demonstrates a determination to take a fund management-based approach as an alternative to one based on mutualisation founded on the principle of solidarity (see Luttringer, 2018; [http://www.jml-conseil.fr/wa\\_files/134\\_20La\\_20transmutation\\_20du\\_20CIF.pdf](http://www.jml-conseil.fr/wa_files/134_20La_20transmutation_20du_20CIF.pdf)).

<sup>49</sup> The CIF funded lengthy training (averaging 800 hours) that was fully funded by the FONGECIFs (average sum outside Ile-de-France: EUR 25 000).

<sup>50</sup> For economically active persons in work, the commitments to liberalising the CEP market expressly state that assistance in setting up a financial package is one aspect of the service.

### 3. The CPF in practice, 2015-2018

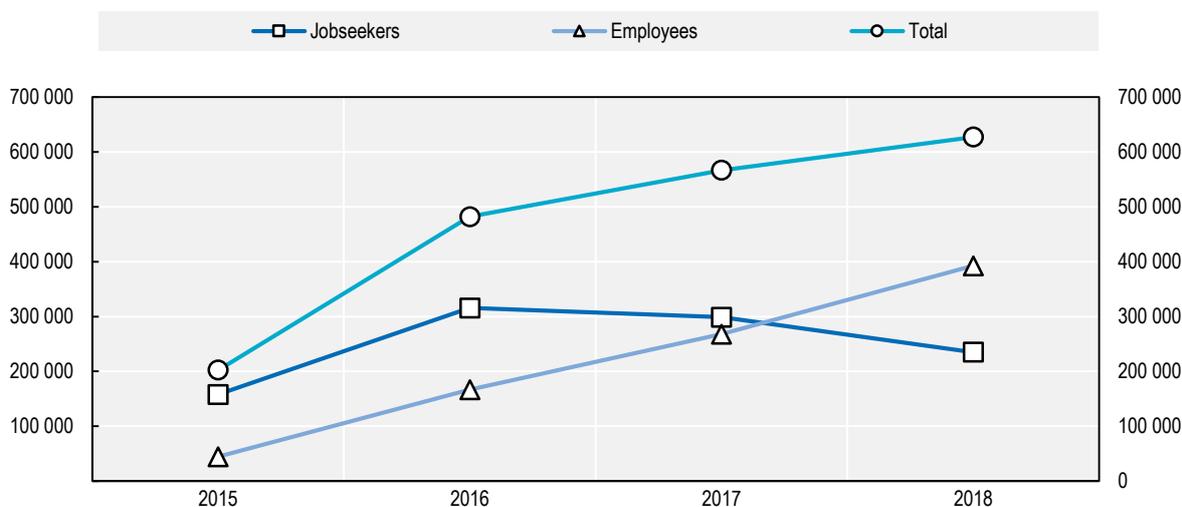
#### 3.1. CPF take-up

##### 3.1.1. How many? A rapid increase, but use is still limited

Between 2015 and 2018, there was a steady increase in take-up of the CPF (Figure 3.1). As mentioned above (Section 2.2.2), employees did not start from scratch, since people who had worked during the DIF period were able to credit their CPF with their DIF hours. Moreover, to make up for the fact that a large number of jobseekers had not accumulated any hours under the DIF, their CPF accounts were credited with a minimum of 100 hours under an agreement between the social partners and the State.

It was mainly jobseekers who initially made use of their CPF. Only 0.5% of employees mobilised their CPFs in the first two years of the scheme, against 8% of jobseekers (Figure 3.2). The “500 000 Plan”, a large-scale training plan for jobseekers that was launched during the same period, is largely responsible for this strong take-up of the CPF by jobseekers. But employees have increasingly used their CPF and, in 2018, there were more employees participating in the scheme than jobseekers, whose numbers have dropped since 2016.

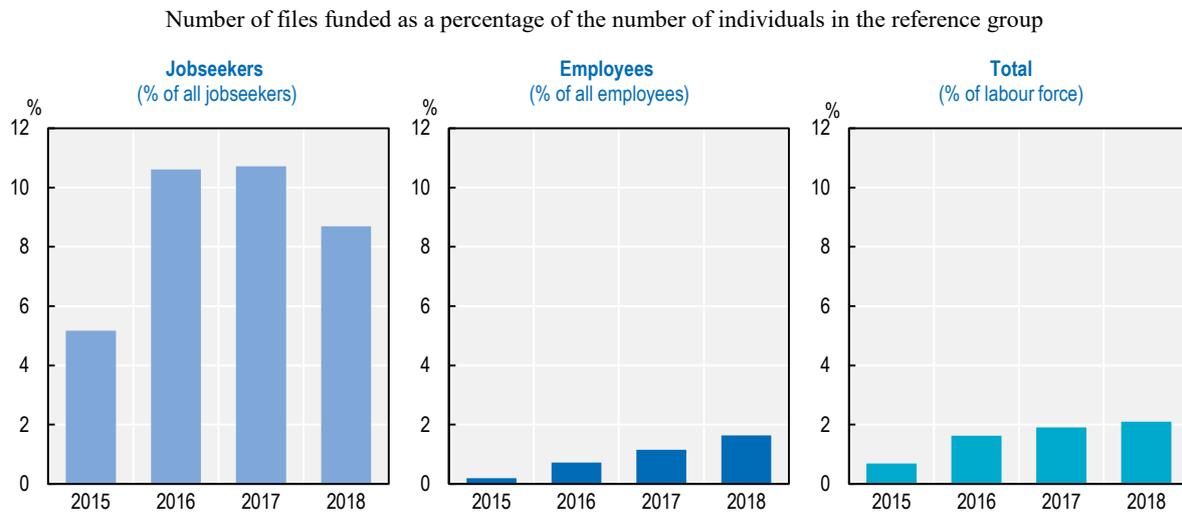
Figure 3.1. The number of files funded has grown, driven by employees



Note: Files validated but not necessarily closed.

Source: OECD Secretariat on the basis of SI-CPF (*Système d'information du compte personnel de formation*) data provided by the *Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations*.

Despite this growth, the take-up rate of the CPF by working people remained low in 2018, with a total of just over 2% of the labour force using it. This is partly attributable to the complexity of the scheme, highlighted by the IGAS in its 2017 report. According to the IGAS (*Bilan d'étape du déploiement du compte personnel de formation, 2017*), the actors involved in implementing the CPF (funders, firms and training providers) needed some time to understand and learn to navigate it.

**Figure 3.2. The CPF take-up rate remains low**

Note: Files validated but not necessarily closed.

Source: OECD Secretariat on the basis of SI-CPF data provided by the *Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations*.

The IGAS (Bilan d'étape du déploiement du compte personnel de formation, 2017) also emphasises that individuals found it difficult to access and use CPF entitlements. Firstly, the DIF credits were not simple to recuperate, because employers did not always fulfil their obligation to notify their employees about these rights on their payslips, particularly in small companies. Moreover, the CPF information system (SI-CPF) was not very user-friendly, and it was difficult to navigate:

- When activating their account, employees were asked to provide their company's SIRET (company identification) number along with the principal business activity code (*code d'activité principale*, APE) and the classification of economic activities (*nomenclature d'activité française*, NAF) code to identify their sector and consequently the relevant training fund (OPCA) and the training for which they were eligible. Although these codes are supposed to appear on the payslip, employees are commonly unaware of them. This sometimes meant that information had to be obtained from the employer, although not all employees wanted their employers to know about their application. Moreover, the APE/NAF codes did not always correspond precisely to the sector, resulting in errors in the lists of training posted, which sometimes led the OPCAs to refuse funding.
- The language used was not very accessible ("*éditeur de listes*" ["list editor"], "*OPCA*", "*autorité certificatrice*" ["certifying authority"]), and did not always reflect the diversity of situations of applicants. For example, people interested in using their CPF with their employer's agreement were advised to contact the "head of human resources or the employee representative body", but this is not relevant for employees in microenterprises and SMEs.
- The steps to be followed were not always clear. For example, the proposed alternative to use the CPF "alone" or "without one's employer" could be confusing for a non-informed user, as well as the requirement to provide the system with information on the dates of training, when those are often defined afterwards by the training provider.

- The search engine for eligible training programmes functioned poorly, particularly because it was difficult to find one’s way around the certifications on offer in France: under the CPF, there were, for example, more than 20 different eligible programmes for the job of medical secretary. Moreover, it offered a list of eligible programmes, but no list of associated training providers and/or training sessions, which the individual needed to search for independently. This made it difficult to search for and locate a particular training programme within the lists.

As for self-employed workers, in theory they have had access to the CPF since January 2018, but in practice they have had marginal, if any, access to it: it has taken some time for the funding channels to be set up.<sup>51</sup>

### **3.1.2. Who? The traditional inequalities in access to training still apply**

The initial results on mobilisation of the CPF, published in January 2018, showed that the same disparities in access to training as are traditionally identified in France exist with the CPF, as confirmed by the most recent data (Balmat & Corazza, 2020). These results are also partly corroborated by the qualitative evaluation of the scheme that was carried out in the first half of 2018 (Pluricité-Itineré, 2018)

Among those who mobilised their CPFs, men (both jobseekers and employees) are over-represented.<sup>52</sup>

Among employees (men and women), people with higher educational attainment use their CPFs more than others, and those with a low level of education use them relatively little (Figure 3.3). Just over a quarter of the employees who mobilised their CPFs had a level of qualification greater than or equal to the *licence* (Bachelor’s degree) or the *maîtrise universitaire* (Master’s degree). This bias in take-up is also to be found in the socio-professional categories, where, among other things, engineers and employees in managerial/professional occupations are significantly over-represented (they account for nearly 31% of beneficiaries of the CPF, while representing only 17.8% of people in employment in 2016). The data provided by certain OPCAs to the IGAS also revealed marked inequalities in access to training under the CPF, with, for instance, blue-collar workers making up 37% of the 1.5 million employees covered by a particular OPCA, but only 16% of employees covered by that OPCA using their CPF (IGAS, 2017).

These inequalities in access are normal for training, but from the small amount of information available it appears that they are even more marked in the case of the CPF. In 2016, the participation rate in CPF training for employees in managerial and senior professional occupations was 3.4 times higher than that of blue-collar workers and twice

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<sup>51</sup> Each of the seven training funds (*Fonds d’Assurance Formation*, FAFs) for self-employed workers sets aside (but does not earmark) a portion of contributions for the CPF, and the individual accounts of self-employed workers are not yet credited, as the FAFs are not able to pinpoint the individuals who have contributed. The system was not stabilised at the Central Agency for Social Security Bodies (*Agence Centrale des Organismes de Sécurité Sociale*, ACOSS), which collects the training contribution. An IGAS initiative launched in 2019 was initially scheduled to deliver a report on the FAFs and the collection of contributions at the end of June 2019, but it had still not been published by the start of 2020. The first euros will be credited in April 2020 on the basis of income declared in 2018 and 2019.

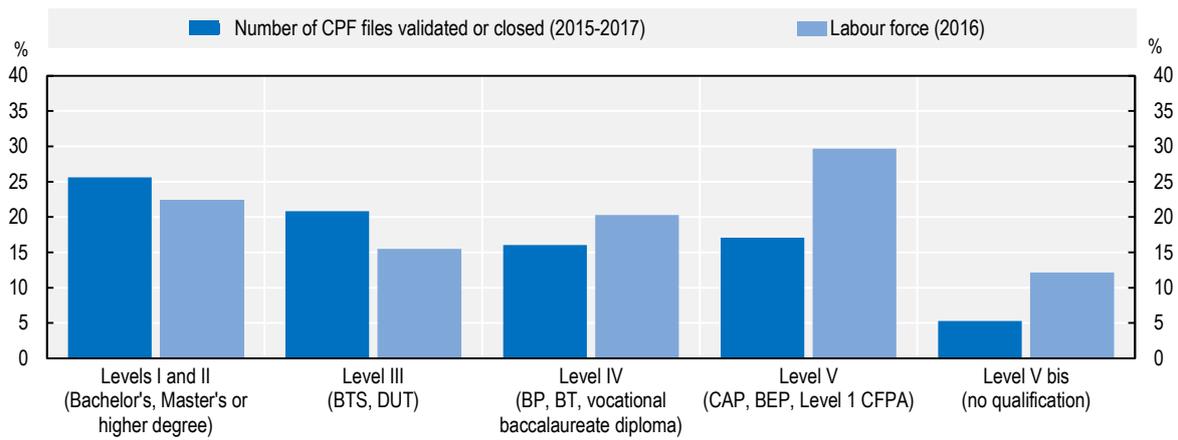
<sup>52</sup> They account for 54% of the files validated or closed during the 2015-2018 period (source: CDC SI-CPF).

that of low-qualified white-collar workers,<sup>53</sup> whereas in 2012 these ratios were 1.7 and 1.6, respectively, for vocational training of employed people.<sup>54</sup>

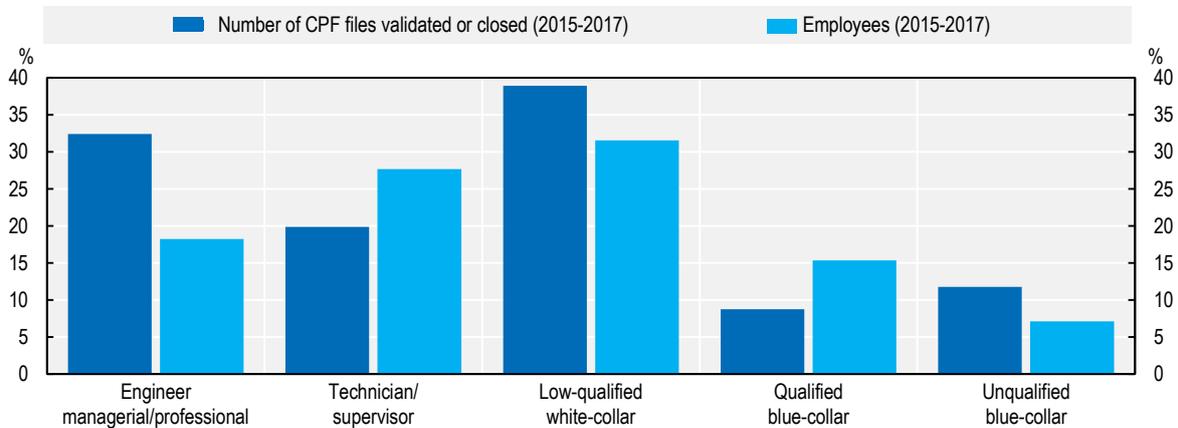
As regards jobseekers, the information on initial education level is too patchy to be used (53% of jobseekers' CPF files validated or closed during the period 2015-2018 do not include this information).<sup>55</sup>

**Figure 3.3. Participation in the CPF is highest among the most highly qualified**

**A. Initial education level of employees accessing training via the CPF compared with the total labour force**



**B. Socio-professional category of employees accessing training via the CPF compared with all employees**



*Note:* 15% of employees' files lack information on the level of education; there are no available data on the breakdown of employees by initial level of qualification.

*Source:* DARES (database of data from the SI-CPF) and 2016 employment survey.

<sup>53</sup> Source: Balmat (Le compte personnel de formation, 2018).

<sup>54</sup> Source: Gossiaux and Pommier (La formation des adultes, 2013).

<sup>55</sup> Source: CDC, SI-CPF.

Similarly, employees of microenterprises and SMEs use their CPFs less than those of large enterprises. In 2016, the take-up rate by employees of enterprises with fewer than 10 employees was three times lower than that for France as a whole, and here again this discrepancy is greater than for access to vocational training in general, which was 1.5 in 2012.<sup>56</sup> The qualitative evaluation corroborates these results: member enterprises with fewer than 11 employees form the majority in the four OPCAs studied, but they are significantly under-represented in terms of share of CPF files. For example, in Constructyts (the construction sector training fund) 91% of member enterprises have fewer than 11 employees, but they account for only 11% of the CPF training files (Pluricité-Itinéré, 2018).

These inequalities in access could partly be explained by certain obstacles to mobilisation of the CPF, mentioned by employees:

- The top-up to funding that has to be provided when the project is personal (this is the case with the “autonomous” CPF, when the hourly costs exceed the OPCA’s funding ceilings); this affected 8 out of 60 employees in the qualitative study, with a personal contribution ranging from EUR 250 to EUR 1 200. It is worth mentioning that the OPCAs’ cover has become less generous as the scheme has grown. This top-up may have put off the least well-qualified workers, whose financial means are more limited.
- The absence of support for employees (from either the company or a representative of the CEP, see above) might have put them off and caused them to give up their training plans, particularly as the system, especially the financial arrangements (*ingénierie financière*), was particularly complicated. This might have particularly affected the least well-qualified workers and/or those with precarious status, as it is more difficult for them to find their way around complex systems. The lack of information and advice probably also affected the more disadvantaged workers more severely, for several reasons: (i) they are less likely to be aware of the scheme’s existence; (ii) they have less of the information needed to make a training choice, in particular about the development prospects for certain trades on the labour market and the quality of training providers and programmes on offer; and (iii) they are probably less able to assess accurately their own capacity for training in certain trades.

Along with the obstacles mentioned previously, these factors could be genuine hindrances to mobilisation of the CPF for employees with a more tenuous relationship with their company (precarious or part-time employees, or those with several different employers, for instance), or those with fewer resources and less social support to take these steps with or without their employer.

The statistics published by the DARES do not provide any information about the nature of beneficiaries’ employment contracts. However, information gathered from the FAF-TT – the OPCA (training fund) for temporary agency workers – indicates a relatively high use of the CPF by temporary agency workers compared with employees in general. The

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

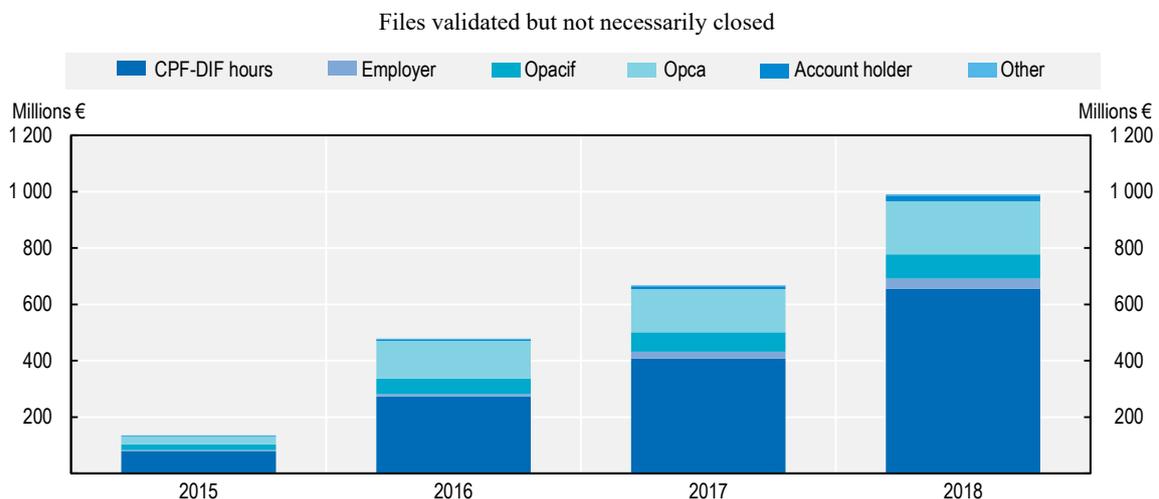
estimated take-up rate of CPF training for temporary workers was 1.9% in 2016,<sup>57</sup> compared with 0.9% for employees as a whole. To a large extent, training of temporary agency workers (financed by the CPF or other programmes) is facilitated by the fact that it takes place outside work assignments, under a training assignment contract (“*contrat de mission formation*”), for which the worker receives remuneration. This contract, established by the temporary work agency, stipulates that the worker is not available for work assignments during this period (but is contractually covered by the temporary employment agency). This also explains why only 4% of the temporary workers who mobilised their CPFs in 2016 did so without informing the temporary employment agency.

Lastly, although we do not have statistical data on them, it may be assumed that workers with several employers (such as childminders) did not make great use of their CPFs because of the difficulty of managing hours earned with multiple employers.

### 3.1.3. How? The CPF often involves top-up funding

For employees, over the period 2015-2018, 62% of the cost of training taken that was covered by their CPFs was funded by DIF/CPF hours. The rest was financed by supplementary contributions (22% by the OPCAs; 10% by the OPACIFs, which managed the funds for *Congés Individuels de Formation* (CIFs); 3% by employers; and 2% by the employees themselves). It emerged from the interviews held that the OPCAs’ budgetary constraints in respect of CPF funding applications started to appear in April 2017, leading them to tighten up the conditions for funding. The proportion of confidential files, in other words those for which the employer is neither informed of nor associated with the employee’s application, remained relatively low, at 4.5% and 7.8% in 2015 and 2016, respectively.

Figure 3.4. Funding of employees’ CPF files



<sup>57</sup> In 2016, 10 500 CPF files were processed by the FAF-TT, in the context of 547 000 full-time equivalent temporary workers in 2015. Source: FAF-TT *Rapport d’activité* (Progress Report) 2015-2016,

[http://www.gip-communication.com/flipbook/7738\\_Faftt\\_RapportActivite\\_2016/29/#zoom=z](http://www.gip-communication.com/flipbook/7738_Faftt_RapportActivite_2016/29/#zoom=z).

Source: Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations.

CPF training for employees usually appears to take place during working hours, planned jointly with the employer. According to the DARES, 7.8% of employees who mobilised their CPFs in 2016 did so alone (“autonomous” CPFs), without informing their employer. It may therefore be concluded that most of this training took place outside working hours. According to the qualitative evaluation, the percentage of “autonomous” CPFs varies widely from one OPCA to another (between 27% and 45% for the four OPCAs in 2017). However, these data are yet to be confirmed.

As regards jobseekers, the expenditure data are not usable in practice,<sup>58</sup> but it emerges clearly that a far smaller proportion of the cost of training taken by those mobilising their CPFs was funded by CPF hours: less than one-seventh of the hours. This may be explained both by the longer duration of training taken (see below), the smaller number of hours accumulated by jobseekers and the low “purchasing power” of one CPF hour for a jobseeker (EUR 9). Often, this has meant that co-financing was necessary. In terms of contributions from different funding bodies for jobseekers, *Pôle Emploi* provided by far the highest level of supplementary contributions, followed by the FPSPP and the Regions. However, supplementary contributions for jobseekers diminished over time, in particular after the “500 000 Plan” came to an end, and the proportion of funding provided by DIF/CPF hours therefore sharply increased, especially in 2018.

## 3.2. The type of training chosen

### 3.2.1. Very variable in length

Broadly reflecting the availability of supplementary funding, the length of CPF training is significantly greater for jobseekers than for employees.

On average, for all CPF files validated or closed (planned and completed) from 2015 to 2018, the length of training was 451 hours for jobseekers and 102 hours for employees. Over time, this average length of training for validated files fell for employees, from 117 hours in 2015 to 88 hours in 2018 (Balmat & Corazza, 2020). For closed projects as a whole (only those completed), the average length was lower: 273 hours for jobseekers and 78 hours for employees (Figure 3.5, Panel A).<sup>59</sup>

Approximately three-quarters of employees’ CPF files validated or closed were for relatively short periods of training (less than 100 hours) over the period 2015-2017, compared with one-third of jobseekers’ files over the period 2015-2016 (Figure 3.5, Panel B).<sup>60</sup> According to the qualitative evaluation carried out on employee CPF files for four OPCAs, the average length was 103 hours in 2017, with a wide variation (from 75 hours to 208 hours) depending on the financing strategies of these bodies. In keeping with this, the teaching costs covered also vary, between EUR 2 052 and EUR 3 620 per CPF training programme.

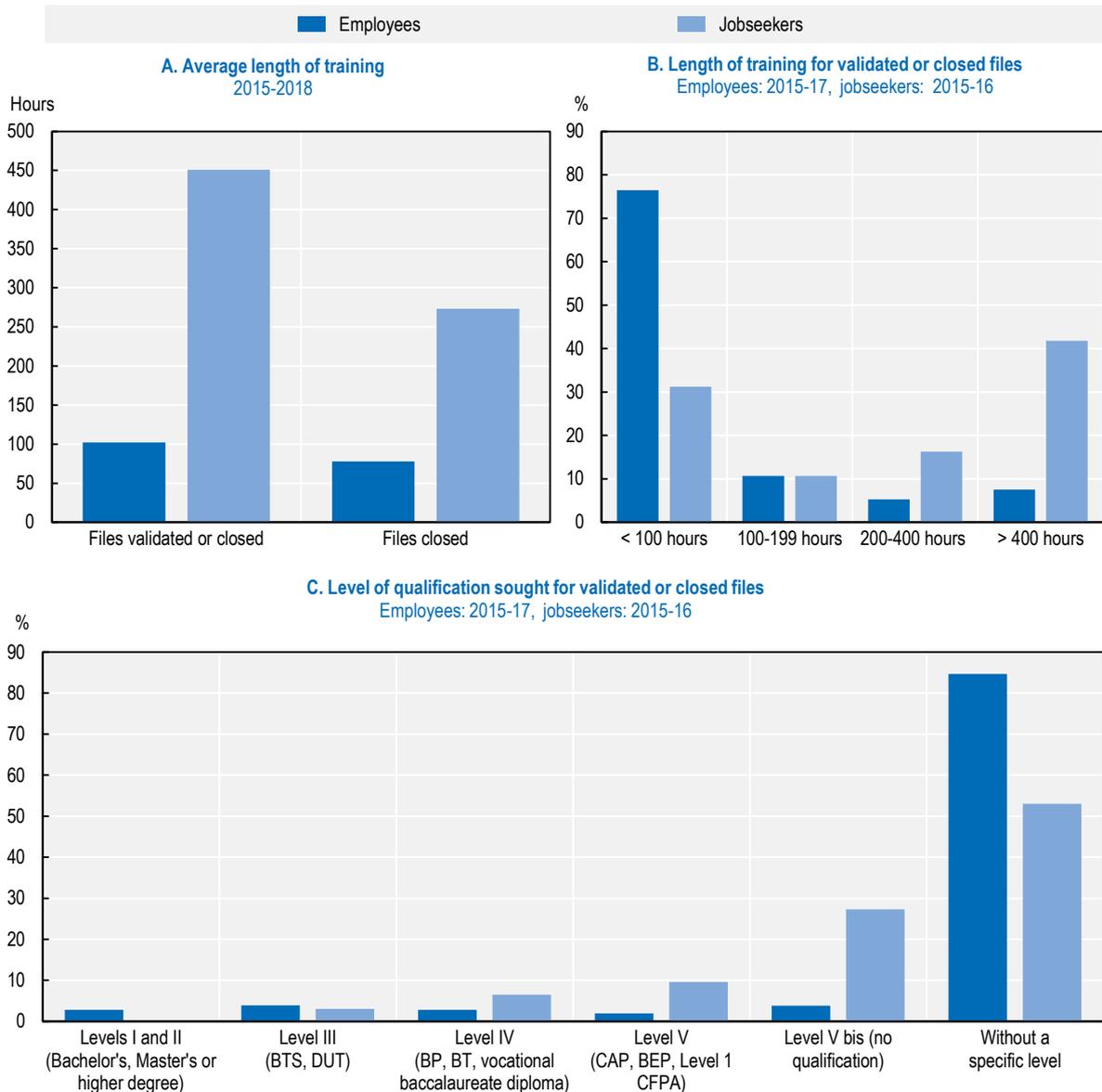
<sup>58</sup> Data for the various sources of funding have not yet been reconciled.

<sup>59</sup> As the average length of CPF projects has tended to fall over time, the only possible explanation for this difference between validated and closed files must be that the validated projects that are ultimately dropped are those of longer duration.

<sup>60</sup> Source: DARES.

Conversely, more than 40% of jobseekers took long training programmes – of 400 hours or more – in the first two years of the CPF, whereas only 8% of employees did so between 2015 and 2017. Moreover, as the scheme was ramped up, the proportion of short training courses increased over time (from 71% in 2015 to 79% in 2017 for employees and from 28% in 2015 to 33% in 2016 for jobseekers), reducing the average length.

**Figure 3.5. Characteristics of training taken under the CPF: length of training and level of qualification sought**



Source: Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations (SI-CPF) and DARES

### 3.2.2. *Mainly not leading to a specific qualification level and relatively focused on a small number of training programmes*

The available data, only for the period 2015-2016 for jobseekers and 2015-2017 for employees, indicate that the training taken is mainly non-formal in nature, in other words it does not lead to any specific qualification level.<sup>61</sup> In 2016, just over two-thirds of the training courses taken had no specific qualification level (Figure 3.5, Panel C), this being more frequently the case for employees (83% in 2015 and 2016 and 85% in 2017) than for jobseekers (42% in 2015 and 59% in 2016).<sup>62</sup>

The training courses most frequently financed by employees' CPFs generally cover the same subjects as those financed by the DIF. The most frequently chosen programmes by far are language courses, preparing participants to sit standardised tests assessing their ability to speak and/or write English in the context of work: primarily the Business Language Testing Service (BULATS) and the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC). Over the period 2015-2018, 283 000 employee CPF files validated and not closed, that is to say almost one-third of all employee CPF files, were for this kind of training.<sup>63</sup> With 7% of employees' files, the IT skills test (TOSA) comes third, followed by skills assessments. Training in transport, handling and storage accounted for almost 11% of files over the period 2015-2016.<sup>64</sup> Among employees taking diploma-based training, the level of qualification sought is usually in line with the initial qualification level: Level I training is most frequently chosen by engineers or managers/professionals, Levels II and IV are chosen by low-qualified white-collar workers and Level V by low-qualified white-collar and qualified and unqualified blue-collar workers (Balmat C. , 2018).

The qualitative information obtained from the FAF-TT indicates that temporary workers have often chosen semi-mandatory training programmes, such as accreditation in electrics and chemical/nuclear risks and *Certificats d'Aptitude à la Conduite en Sécurité* (CACES) to operate handling equipment – training that previously had usually been financed by the temporary work agencies out of their own training budget.

The choices of jobseekers are rather more varied, with 117 000 files over the same period being for training falling within the *Socle de Connaissances et de Compétences Professionnelles* (CléA), a certificate that assesses and validates the skills of low-qualified individuals who have no professional certification (approximately 12% of files).<sup>65</sup> 8% of files relate to the *Stage de Préparation à l'Installation* (SPI), a training programme which, until May 2019, was compulsory for skilled workers wanting to start up or take over a business. With 5% of files, another training programme frequently followed by jobseekers is the *Certificat d'Aptitude à la Conduite en Sécurité* (CACES) for materials handling trucks. This certificate is not, as such, compulsory for operating this kind of equipment –

<sup>61</sup> Most training courses taken by employees lead to a certification that is recorded in the Registry (*Inventaire*), in other words with no specified level. According to European definitions, this counts as formal learning (an explicit, recognised scheme where skills are assessed at the end of the course) but in the context of non-formal education (formal education in the European sense being limited to the school and university system).

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Source: CDC, SI-CPF.

<sup>64</sup> Source: DARES, SI-CPF.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

an employer can choose to provide this training in-house. However, it is a way of certifying a worker's knowledge in this area that makes it easier for the employer to issue the permit to operate this equipment, which, for its part, is compulsory. As mentioned above, the inclusion of this certificate (of limited validity in time) in the lists was a subject of much debate between the social partners (see Section 2.2.4).

Jobseekers also often followed diploma-based training programmes, most frequently at a relatively low qualification level (37% of jobseekers' files were for training for a Level V or IV diploma, often chosen by under-26-year-olds, in particular). Among these diploma-based training programmes, those preparing participants for diplomas for healthcare assistants (Level V), nurses (Level II) or executive entrepreneurs (*entrepreneurs-dirigeants*) (Level I) were frequently chosen (Balmat C. , 2018).

However, the terms according to which the CPF can be implemented by jobseekers raise questions about their freedom of choice as regards these training programmes (Box 3.1).

### **Box 3.1. Mobilisation of the CPF by jobseekers: an autonomous choice?**

Until 1 January 2019, a jobseeker could mobilise his or her CPF only through the *Pôle Emploi* adviser, who tended to steer the jobseeker in his or her choice of training, even when the account had sufficient credit to purchase training. The granting of co-financing depended on the operator's assessment of the usefulness of the training and management constraints on financial assistance (for instance, in the case of the training support *Aide Individuelle à la Formation*, no excess is to be payable by the jobseeker).

In practice, the simultaneous launch of the CPF and the "500 000 Plan" often led the *Pôle Emploi* to have training (co-)financed by the CPF (and, more precisely, the appropriation paid by the FPSPP to *Pôle Emploi* and the Regions in respect of the CPF). According to the *Cour des Comptes* (French Court of Auditors), the CPF functioned in practice as a subsidy from the FPSPP, mitigating the cost of training for the *Pôle Emploi* (Cour des comptes, 2018). Although the jobseeker was required to give his or her consent for using the CPF, it appeared that this was not always the case (Pluricité-Itinéré, 2018). Moreover, the *Pôle Emploi* practice of carrying out collective procurement of training courses might have contributed to jobseekers' being directed towards those training programmes.

According to the qualitative evaluation of the scheme, among the 49 jobseekers questioned, there are three main reasons for using the CPF:

- Vocational retraining following layoff or difficulty in finding a regular job in the original branch of activity (21 cases); here, training is most frequently long and leads to a qualification.
- Upskilling with a view to improving one's qualifications (17 cases); this corresponds to generally short training programmes in languages, IT skills, accreditations, etc.
- Setting up a business (11 cases), leading the jobseeker to take a *Stage de Préparation à l'Installation* (approximately 30 hours, compulsory for any person wishing to be entered in the trades register and organised by the Chambers of Trade (*Chambres des Métiers et de l'Artisanat*)).

Most (37/49) of the jobseekers questioned feel that they developed their plans independently and approached the public employment service for administrative and financial support. In this case, the CPF was a means of financing that could be mobilised

in conjunction with others and with the assistance of the *Pôle Emploi* adviser. The evaluation thus highlights the importance of support in the process of implementing the training project and, indirectly, the fact that the CPF was primarily mobilised by jobseekers with the resources to be proactive in their application.

According to the information from the *Cour des Comptes*, the rate of access to employment in the six months following the end of training is slightly higher for CPF beneficiaries (53.6%) – normally associated with a voluntary choice – than for individuals who did not use it (50.7%). This may be attributable to a stronger commitment to training under the CPF on the part of jobseekers.

## 4. The quality of training provision

The question of the quality of vocational training provision has long occupied stakeholders in this sector in France. However, as in other countries that have introduced individual training schemes, the implementation of the CPF has brought these issues to the fore and accelerated reform in this area.

Training provision is segmented in France and also relatively concentrated (France Stratégie, 2015). There are numerous training providers, and in particular many small organisations, some of them one-person businesses, but a small number capture a very large share of the market. Essentially the market lies in the private sector (for-profit and not-for-profit), but some public providers account for a substantial share of hours and personnel.<sup>66</sup> Private and public training providers meet different needs and, in actual fact, the training they offer is siloed: private-sector companies mostly deal with private “for-profit” training providers, whereas in 60% of cases the authorities have recourse to public and quasi-public bodies for audiences other than their own officials (chiefly jobseekers). It is rare to find training providers that operate both in private companies and for public funding bodies, with the exception of a few providers that work in private companies but are also involved in vocational (re)integration and retraining activities (Séchaud & Pottier, 2007).

This large number of service providers of itself makes a quality framework essential. The introduction of the CPF further strengthens this need, as individuals buying training services find themselves in a weaker negotiating position than traditional buyers – public funding bodies, private companies – and are less able to assess the quality of training. Indeed, there is a dual asymmetry in the training market between training providers and “trainees”: asymmetry of information about the quality of fragmented, largely unregulated training provision, on the one hand, and asymmetry in the capacity to negotiate prices, on the other (IGAS, 2017).

In its report on quality processes in vocational training, the National Council on Employment, Vocational Training and Career Guidance (*Conseil National de l'Emploi, de la Formation et de l'Orientation Professionnelles*, CNEFOP) – an organisation involving the State, represented by 12 government departments, the Regions, the social partners and the main operators, which is responsible, among other things, for the evaluation of vocational training, now merged into *France Compétences* – identifies five resources that must be in place in order to develop a high-quality training system: the quality of training providers, certifications, counselling, observation of skills development and information provision on training (CNEFOP, *Rapport faisant synthèse des démarches Qualité menées dans le champ de la formation professionnelle, en liaison avec les financeurs*, 2018).<sup>67</sup> All these collective resources are identified as necessary to promote independent use of individual rights. The question of counselling is discussed below (Section 5. ) and, since observation of skills is outside the scope of this document, this section focuses on the other three areas.

<sup>66</sup> According to the DARES, in 2011, 97% of training providers were in the private sector and they accounted for 78% of the turnover, while catering for 86% of the total number of trainees.

<sup>67</sup> The report also stresses the importance of quality strategies in relation to procurement by public funding bodies.

## 4.1. Training provider quality

### 4.1.1. *The Law of March 2014 and the quality process of the funding bodies*

Until 2014, the State's involvement in monitoring vocational training providers was largely on the administrative and financial side (France Stratégie, 2015). The other funding bodies, in particular the Regions and *Pôle Emploi*, were subject to the Procurement Contract Code (*Code des Marchés Publics*) and therefore procured training services through a tender process in which quality was one of the criteria. The Law of March 2014 (Section 1. ), which established the CPF, at the same time introduced for training funding bodies – the OPCAs, the OPACIFs, the Regions and the *Pôle Emploi* – an obligation to screen the training provider for its capacity to deliver high-quality training. To that end:

- six criteria were set to verify quality, such as identification of the objectives of training and its appropriateness for the individuals being trained, the consistency of the pedagogical tools and the quality of the trainers' credentials;
- the funding bodies were responsible for ensuring that the cost of the services they procured was consistent with their needs and the quality of the service offered;
- they were required to prepare and publish the lists of training providers whom they deemed capable of providing high-quality performance, either through their own evaluation framework or through a label or quality certificate managed by the CNEFOP; and
- the OPCAs' supervisory function was strengthened and the funding bodies were asked to coordinate their screening activities.<sup>68</sup>

This Law and its implementing decree of June 2015 triggered a major effort to define indicators and evidence for quality, the essence of which is now broadly shared by the funding bodies, particularly through the Datadock database that is populated by the training providers themselves on a voluntary basis (Box 4.1). Datadock came about as a result of the efforts of three working groups launched by the OPCAs to meet the expectations under the law: in order to draw up a reference catalogue, a database was required, but nothing was available. Over time, the tool has been adapted in the light of issues brought to light by the indicators or problems encountered in obtaining the necessary information. The platform was implemented in January 2017. By the end of 2018, 65 000 training providers were registered with Datadock (out of 75 000 training providers reporting their business) and 45 000 were ready to be referenced for the purposes of the funding bodies.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Training providers supplying services to different funding bodies have to undergo numerous different checks, which can prove burdensome.

<sup>69</sup> Source: CNEFOP seminar of 17 December 2018 – *L'étape II de la qualité en matière de formation* (Quality in training, Stage II).

#### Box 4.1. Datadock

Datadock, launched in January 2017, is an online platform where vocational training funding bodies can, on the basis of self-reported information and documentary analysis, verify whether training providers meet the six quality criteria laid down by the Law, which are:

- Precise identification of the objectives of training and its appropriateness for the target audience.
- The appropriateness of the arrangements for onboarding, educational follow-up and evaluation for the trainees concerned.
- The adequacy of the pedagogical, technical and organisational tools in respect of the training offered.
- The professional qualifications and in-service training of staff responsible for training.
- The accessibility to the general public of information on the training offered, waiting times and outcomes.
- The consideration given to feedback provided by trainees.

These six criteria are broken down into 21 indicators. After training providers have registered on Datadock, they have to file evidence in line with the 21 indicators defined by the funding bodies to meet the six criteria. There is a simplified procedure for training providers holding CNEFOP-approved certification.

Once the conformity of the supporting documentation has been verified, the training providers are regarded as “datadocked”, and any funders may include them in their reference catalogue.

Source: [www.datadock.fr](http://www.datadock.fr)

In providing a database listing high-quality training providers for the funders, Datadock was a real step forward in ensuring the quality of training, or, to be more precise, the resources put in place by training providers that affect the quality of training (primarily a question of meeting “obligations of means”). It was also a way in which training providers were given the impetus to formalise evidence of quality (CNEFOP, *Rapport faisant synthèse des démarches Qualité menées dans le champ de la formation professionnelle, en liaison avec les financeurs*, 2018). Another positive spin-off was that, by coordinating the monitoring of training providers among funders, the number of checks could be significantly reduced.<sup>70</sup> However, training providers criticised the cumbersome procedures and administrative complexity of registering with Datadock, which risked bureaucratising the process and thereby driving the smallest providers away. Moreover, despite the efforts made to adjust the required indicators for small training providers and the self-employed, they still feel that these indicators bear little relation to their priorities and their mode of operation.

<sup>70</sup> Between May and December 2018, 782 on-site inspections took place, compared with 4 036 if each funder had carried out its own inspection. Source: CNEFOP seminar of 17 December 2018 – *L'étape II de la qualité en matière de formation* (Quality in training, Stage II).

At the same time, this exercise of populating Datadock brought to light certain weaknesses in the training sector (CNEFOP, Rapport faisant synthèse des démarches Qualité menées dans le champ de la formation professionnelle, en liaison avec les financeurs, 2018), in particular on the teaching side, which was often presented by training providers as being the responsibility of the trainer, disregarding the role played by the structure, management framework and materials/resources available to trainers. Other bodies demonstrated difficulties in adapting their training provision to the target audience, which, with the transition to individualised requirements specific to the CPF, could be a cause for concern. Lastly, training providers also demonstrated weaknesses in the arrangements for evaluating training outcomes as well as in-service training for trainers.<sup>71</sup>

#### ***4.1.2. The multiplicity of certifications and labels<sup>72</sup>***

Prior to and in parallel with these quality processes deriving from the 2014 Law, other measures were implemented to ensure the quality of training delivered, in particular through the certification of training organisations and the awarding of labels to them.

Certification is a procedure whereby an accredited third party provides a written assurance that a product, quality system or service is in conformity with the specifications. It is made possible by approved standards officially sanctioned by the authorities. The French Accreditation Committee (*Comité Français d'Accréditation*, COFRAC), established in 1994, is the only accreditation body in France, which can, among other things, validate the capacity of these certifying bodies to qualify other companies in line with European and international standards.

There are various different kinds of certification. Some certifying bodies, such as AFNOR Certification, issue certification to the ISO and AFNOR standards. The ISO standard applies to all sectors and is granted to an organisation demonstrating quality management that focuses on customer satisfaction. The certifying bodies' investigations therefore cover the organisation and processes set up by the training body, the qualification of trainers and client relationships. There is a specific ISO for training (ISO 29990), but it is costly to achieve this certification, and only a minority of training providers avail themselves of it. AFNOR has also drawn up NF standards for vocational training services. Since services are involved, it is not possible to specify a guaranteed outcome, but only "obligations of means". The standards assigned to training bodies thus certify the services provided and not the organisation. An *NF Service Formation Professionnelle* label may be granted to bodies providing evidence of at least three years of existence and conformity with the aforementioned standards and other French and European regulations. In 2015, few training providers had availed themselves of the label, but a large percentage were making use of the standards themselves.

Some certifying bodies have also created their own labels. This is the case of the Professional Qualification Office for Training Organisations (*Office Professionnel de Qualification des Organismes de Formation*, OPQF) and the Certification Institute for Training Professionals (*Institut de Certification des Professionnels de la Formation*, ICPF). The former body, one of the founders of which was the Vocational Training Federation

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<sup>71</sup> This is aggravated by the major role played by subcontracting in these professions, in so far as a training provider cannot train a subcontractor without risking the contractual relationship being reclassified as an employment contract.

<sup>72</sup> This section is based primarily on *France Stratégie* (Le marché de la formation professionnelle continue à l'épreuve de l'enjeu de la qualité, 2015).

(*Fédération de la Formation Professionnelle*), issues a label verifying the body's stability (particularly financial stability) and certifies the training provider's professionalism. It awards a provisional qualification (one year) to bodies that have existed for between two and five years and a regular qualification (three years) for training providers that have existed for more than five years and whose trainers have at least five years' experience. This label is less demanding than the ISO standard and, above all, less costly, but it does not involve on-site inspection. The ICPF, for its part, issues three types of certification (valid for three years) for individuals, following an audit carried out among the applicant's clients: *agrée* (approved), *qualifié* (qualified) and *expert* (expert).

Some training providers have also developed their own charters and labels, such as, for instance, the Groups of National Education Establishments (*Groupements d'Établissements de l'Éducation Nationale*, GRETA). Training providers' employers' associations have developed "quality charters"; sometimes these are simply declarations.

Lastly, some regions have adopted policies in favour of certification of training providers, introducing their own arrangements and benchmark standards.

By the end of 2017, the list drawn up by the CNEFOP included a total of 49 certifications, which did not all offer the same effective quality guarantees. Since the CNEFOP did not, moreover, have any means of supervision, this list did not provide all the guarantees that it should have (CNEFOP, *Rapport faisant synthèse des démarches Qualité menées dans le champ de la formation professionnelle, en liaison avec les financeurs*, 2018). The CNEFOP satisfied itself as to conformity for the certification applied for, in line with the criteria of the Decree. However, its discretion did not extend to the professionalism of the certifying bodies (rigorousness of methods, independent and impartial nature of the certification issuing process, etc.). This therefore led to an excessively large, disparate list that was difficult to follow and was not helpful to an individual wishing to mobilise a CPF and select a training provider.

#### **4.1.3. The 2018 reform: towards single, compulsory certification**

With the specific aim of improving the harmonisation of practices and quality in vocational training provision that began with the 2014 Law, the Law of 5 September 2018 on "freedom to choose one's professional career" lays down the principle of a single, compulsory certification for all training providers wishing to avail themselves of public or joint funding. This new certification marks the end of the voluntary nature of the quality process and will replace all current certifications and labels.

The implementing decree of 6 June 2019 on the quality of vocational training programmes defines the criteria by which quality is to be assessed. There are seven such criteria, six of which are adopted from Datadock, broken down into 32 indicators. All in all, the new certification, while it still relates to training bodies rather than training programmes as such, goes further than mere obligations of means and is intended to be more focused on the logic of career development: rather than being centred solely on a means- and process-based logic, the new certification is designed to concentrate more on outcomes and the objectives of the skills development activities implemented by the training bodies. The new criterion is about "the integration and investment of the service provider in its professional environment". Proposed by the CNEFOP in its report on quality (CNEFOP, *Rapport faisant synthèse des démarches Qualité menées dans le champ de la formation professionnelle, en liaison avec les financeurs*, 2018), it consists in detailing the obligations associated with the oversight exercised by the training body and the use of data gleaned from that oversight in the design and organisation of its activities: legal oversight, oversight of skills

development and oversight of innovation in training methods. This is in order to evaluate how well the training provider is embedded locally and its knowledge of stakeholders in the area, its capacity to diagnose needs, analyse the demand placed on it and guide the beneficiaries. Furthermore, the six criteria adopted from Datadock were adjusted, and, in particular, the indicators making up these criteria were reviewed.

By 1 January 2022,<sup>73</sup> all the training providers concerned must have the “Qualiopi” certification, issued by a certifying body chosen by the training provider from among those authorised by the COFRAC, the public accreditation body.<sup>74</sup> The certifying body verifies the data sent in by the training providers and conducts an on-site audit, to ensure that what has been declared is indeed in place and that it corresponds to the single quality benchmark standard, and a surveillance audit one year later. Certification must be renewed every three years. Modified audit arrangements will apply to training providers that already have a label or certificate recognised by the CNEFOP: only certain indicators will be audited, and therefore it will not take so long.

The implementing decree of June 2019 lays down the cost range for this certification for training providers, according to turnover and the number of days’ work by the certifying body, which depends on the size of the company.<sup>75</sup>

Qualiopi certification will be an eligibility criterion for all public and joint funding. Funders will still be free to choose the training provider they prefer and to apply their own requirements as part of the contractual relationship. Without Qualiopi certification, the provider will still, in principle, be able to work as a training provider for private companies and organisations responsible for their own skills development programmes. However, in practice, it is likely that training departments of companies (particularly large companies) will require this certification.

Small training providers face one of the risks of this reform: they might either go out of business or find themselves in a dependent status in relation to larger training providers. The cost of this now compulsory certification is not negligible (financial cost paid to the certifying body and cost in terms of time spent collating the evidence), and some small training providers will probably not be able to afford this. There are two different situations:

- On the one hand, self-employed trainers, for whom training is their main activity, and who are often subcontracted to larger training providers. Under the new benchmark standard, subcontractor training providers do not need to have Qualiopi certification if the principal contractor does so. But the risk is then that these self-employed trainers will be locked into situations of financial dependence on principal contractors (“uberisation”).
- On the other hand, self-employed trainers for whom training was not initially their core activity, but who provide training services in relation to their main business,

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<sup>73</sup> The initially planned deadline was January 2021, but this has been postponed as a result of the COVID-19 health crisis.

<sup>74</sup> Until then, certifications listed by the CNEFOP were not necessarily issued by bodies accredited by the COFRAC. As a result of the 2018 Law, this accreditation became mandatory; an alternative is recognition by *France Compétences* under the umbrella of “public” labelling bodies.

<sup>75</sup> The cost starts at EUR 1 500 for the initial audit and a follow-up audit where turnover is less than EUR 150 000 (net of tax) a year.

which often makes them very relevant to this activity.<sup>76</sup> One way of reducing this cost for these small training providers might be for them to join forces as partners with mutually complementary professions. However, it is questionable whether there is any point in their maintaining this secondary activity.

One of the harmful consequences of this market concentration would, therefore, be the disappearance of these niche, tailored training activities, which are specifically relevant to particular trades.

## 4.2. The role of professional certifications

One aim of the CPF is to develop qualifying training that is best suited to the labour market (Section 2.1). This aim is primarily based on the obligation for training programmes to lead to certification (or acquisition of a skills package). Certifications are therefore seen as another “quality tool”, demonstrating how training improves qualifications (Section 2.2.4). Until December 2018, in order to be eligible for the CPF, these certifications had to be chosen from the list of eligible certifications, but since January 2019 all training programmes registered with the *Registre National des Certifications Professionnelles* (National Registry of Professional Qualifications – RNCP) or the *Répertoire Spécifique* (Specific Register, formerly *Inventaire*) have become eligible for the CPF. Whether they are listed with the RNCP or the *Répertoire Spécifique*, professional certifications are the result of work in the public interest carried out by the State, the social partners or the training bodies, and are deemed to demonstrate that knowledge, capacities and skills are in line with the expectations of the labour market to carry out a job or a class of jobs (CNEFOP, *Rapport faisant synthèse des démarches Qualité menées dans le champ de la formation professionnelle, en liaison avec les financeurs*, 2018).

However, the implementation of the CPF has helped to show that the way in which certifications are provided is still complex and suffers from a glaring lack of clarity (IGAS and IGAENR, 2016). The RNCP covers a huge range of certifications that have come about in different ways. As it is a criterion for eligibility for the CPF that training should lead to certification, the number of applications for registration with the RNCP and the *Inventaire* has greatly increased. The IGAS and the Inspectorate-General for the Administration of National Education and Research (*Inspection Générale de l'Administration de l'Éducation Nationale et de la Recherche*, IGAENR) have highlighted a number of problems, in particular the fact that the approval procedure for certifications has drifted away from its original purpose, which was to verify the validity of the existence of a certification in the light of employment trends and to assign a level to it. The commission responsible for registering certifications (CNCP) did not actually have the power to reject the registration of a certification for a job when an equivalent certification already existed. The IGAS also noted that information was not always provided on careers to which the certification might lead and it was not always relevant (IGAS, 2017). The resources allocated to the CNCP were also deemed to be markedly insufficient for it to perform its functions.

Furthermore, whereas most government departments started breaking their certifications down into skills packages – which is central to allowing the CPF to function properly – this work went on without consultation and therefore was incapable of producing homogeneous

<sup>76</sup> As an example, one might cite the case of a producer of organically grown soft fruits and berries in a mountainous area, who has been training farmers setting up their own business or young agricultural college students, for whom the cost of Qualiopi certification is prohibitive.

skills modules that could help to establish pathways between the diplomas and certificates of the different departments (IGAS and IGAENR, 2016).

What is more, certification is not synonymous with quality in training programmes. Professional certification involves testing trainees to show that they have the expected skills and there are many possible teaching methods leading to certification. Certain training providers, such as in the foreign languages sector, have opted to register their programmes in existing certification standards, linking them superficially with their training programme, such as just registering trainees to TOEFL, BULATS or TOEIC exam sessions without modifying the content of their programme (IGAS, 2017).

With the reform, the CNCP has now been integrated into *France Compétences*. The aim is now to try to link certification more closely with the added value of training in terms of employment. Whereas the CNCP used to focus primarily on how the training benchmark standard was framed, emphasis is now to be placed on the extent to which certification helps in achieving vocational integration. Given the large number of certifications, it remains to be seen whether this initiative is operationally feasible.

For certain audiences, however, the restriction of eligible CPF training to certification-based programmes alone is seen as a restriction on freedom of choice. This is the case, for instance, for self-employed business people or artists, who are often interested in training that does not lead to certification.

### 4.3. Evaluation of training outcomes and information provided to the public

The quality processes discussed above are about the prerequisites for eligibility for CPF training programmes. *Ex post* evaluation of training programmes and their outcomes and how these are communicated to the public are another major feature of the quality process. This is necessary so that individuals can, among other things, make an informed choice about the training they want to take/buy.

As mentioned above, the Datadock exercise revealed the weaknesses of training providers as far as the evaluation of their training outcomes was concerned (CNEFOP, Rapport faisant synthèse des démarches Qualité menées dans le champ de la formation professionnelle, en liaison avec les financeurs, 2018). After the reform, the funders, which compulsory certification has released from the responsibility of evaluating the capacity of training providers, will shift their evaluation further downstream to the stages of training programmes and their outcomes. Some years ago, the General Delegation for Employment and Vocational Training (*Délégation Générale à l'Emploi et à la Formation Professionnelle*, DGEFP) launched a project called AGORA with the purpose of measuring teaching performance on training programmes and their impact on integration into employment, to help steer public policies, in particular training procurement. This involves putting together a registration platform combining all the following data on a training programme: guidance to individuals prior to starting training; entry and exit patterns and the delivery of the training activity/programme; the outcomes for trainees, including how they are tied in with the DSN (*déclaration sociale nominative*) electronic reporting system for employers. These data would be shared among funders and public operators, whereas to date this information has been very segmented, with each funder having only partial information. This very ambitious project is in progress, but the lead time for implementation is long. The contributors are currently working on harmonising terminology and coding their various activities. The database will be populated gradually, with initial priority given to training under the PIC. When completed, it should provide

all-round visibility of training pathways. In the meantime, funders will continue to evaluate training programmes and their outcomes independently.

Regarding the CPF, training providers are obliged to communicate certain items of information, which are/will be published, in particular administrative data, such as waiting times for training (response time and possible session cancellations) and the diploma success rate. In addition to providing information about employment opportunities open to those with professional certification, the site provides/will provide data on employment rates. These will be communicated by the certifying body in the papers filed with the Certification Commission.<sup>77</sup> In the longer term, it will also be possible to use AGORA for these calculations.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, at a later time, a more qualitative, rather than representative, evaluation, based on subjective feedback from trainees, is to be made available (a “Tripadvisor for training”).

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<sup>77</sup> These data also apply to certification success rates.

<sup>78</sup> From 1 January 2021, all certifying bodies are required to report to AGORA the names and ID details of people passing the certification tests.

## 5. Guidance and counselling

As stated above, one of the objectives of the CPF is to reduce unequal access to training, and therefore to promote access to it by the least skilled and workers in small businesses that have no human resources department to support their professional development. The experience of the DIF showed that merely providing an entitlement does not mean that all recipients will be able to use it effectively (IGAS, 2017). Therefore, the establishment of the CPF occurred in parallel to the establishment of CEP.

### 5.1. The establishment in parallel of Career Development Counselling (CEP)

The establishment of the CPF occurred at the same time as provision was made for professional advisory support services, namely Career Development Counselling (CEP). This reform, “which creates a system” (CNEFOP, Premier rapport sur la mise en œuvre du Compte Personnel de Formation et du Conseil en évolution professionnelle, 2016) “to build continuity out of disrupted careers”, involves attaching “an entitlement to lifelong guidance” to the entitlement to employee-led training, regardless of labour market status.

The same documents that underpin the CPF thus established CEP (National Cross-Sector Agreement of December 2013, Law of 5 March 2014); note, however, that CEP does not merely support mobilisation of the CPF. Moreover, seeking advice from CEP is not compulsory in order to mobilise the CPF, because of the need to respect an individual’s capacity for initiative. Rather it is envisaged as an optional, free resource that is available to people in order to encourage career development and security. (Article L6111-6 of the Labour Code).

Thus the aim is not to leave an individual adrift with a new entitlement, but to provide him with the possibility of using it effectively by informing the decisions he makes at any stage in the process (discussion of career prospects, building a career, funding training, etc.). The joint establishment of these two “schemes” points, however, to the fact that CEP could act as an aid or a tool when mobilising the scheme.<sup>79</sup>

#### 5.1.1. What is CEP?

CEP supplies a set of services set out in specifications that apply to all operators (five in all; see below). The service provision divides into three levels (see Dole, 2014):

- Personalised information and welcome (define the scope of the possible);
- Personalised advice (build a career plan, make choices);
- Personalised support to implement the project (including financial engineering).

Additionally, CEP is intended to bring about a change in attitude among advisors who should no longer act “on behalf of” but instead “with” their mentees to help them clarify the choices available and carry out their decisions (IGAS, 2017). In other words, “A project

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<sup>79</sup> Article L6111-6. Labour Code (contd.): “The advice service supports professional development projects in association with existing and foreseeable economic needs in the Regions. It facilitates access to training by identifying the skills and training that satisfy the needs articulated by the person concerned and the available funding, and it facilitates use where appropriate of the Personal Training Account.”

co-construction stance was to replace the prescriptive logic where the latter still prevailed' (D'Agostino, Baghioni, Gauraud, Legay, & Valette-Whursten, 2019).

### 5.1.2. *Who delivers CEP?*

The initial idea was to “build a universal advice service as the best way for public services to take on the sensitive work of giving careers advice” (CNEFOP, Premier rapport sur la mise en œuvre du Compte Personnel de Formation et du Conseil en évolution professionnelle, 2016).

In practice, CEP was implemented using existing resources by five of the operators in the government employment agency with a nationwide presence, each of which had their own “target group”.<sup>80</sup> *Pôle Emploi*, the APEC (Association for Executive Employment), *Missions Locales* (Local Missions – social integration and transition to the workplace for young people 16-25 years of age), *Cap Emploi* (for disabled workers) and the FONGECIFs and OPACIFs (joint bodies managing CIF). They were nationally accredited to deliver these services by the government, and a common framework (specifications, “Guide Repères” (Benchmarks)<sup>81</sup>) was drawn up to provide a structure for rolling out the scheme and providing the services in question. Despite this framework, the variation among the operators, their target groups, professional practices, and institutional and budgetary constraints affected CEP delivery as illustrated in the assessment of the service by Céreq (D'Agostino, Legay, Valette-Wursten, Gayraud, & Baghioni, 2019) and Cirel (Pagoni, et al., 2019), both on behalf of the CNEFP (National Council for the Assessment of Vocational Training, a joint assessment body affiliated to the COPANEF, which disappeared with the reform). In fact, the assessment points to two approaches to CEP, one advocated by the FONGECIFs, the APEC and *Pôle Emploi* where it was regarded as a “vector for professional enrichment or raising skills” and the other advocated by the *Missions Locales* and *Cap Emploi*, which considered it to be yet another binding “order” that contributed nothing.

### 5.1.3. *Lack of awareness and under-utilisation of CEP*

The launch of CEP was unquestionably affected by the simultaneous launch of the CPF, which stirred much activity among stakeholders (including at sector level in the drafting of lists, and among training operators/funders as momentum rose) overshadowing CEP. Moreover, the launch occurred just as a merger of regions was under way (which also involved the merging of public regional reception and professional guidance services), and this did nothing to lessen the task facing local stakeholders (Pagoni, et al., 2019). Overall, CEP was largely unknown to the target population at the time.

“According to the statistics from the DGEFP extranet, in 2017 there were 2 048 260 recipients of CEP at levels 2 and 3 compared to 1 541 544 in 2016 and 732 195 in 2015, highlighting strong momentum behind CEP roll-out over the past two years” (*Jaune Budgétaire*, 2019, p. 134). The same source states that 8 out of 10 supported people were looking for a job. IGAS comments “CEP remains confidential for the 26 million employed workers, a long way from the potential target group of 10% among them who undergo a

<sup>80</sup> The CEP was initially established without specific financial means and was later placed under these operators who were instructed to finance them from their own funds. This did not help to remove barriers to careers guidance which was still based on a person's status.

<sup>81</sup> <https://travail-emploi.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/guide-cep-2017.pdf>.

change of circumstance each year, whether of their own choosing or otherwise” (IGAS, 2017).

According to the CNEFOP, which conducted the review of CEP’s four years of operation, “the communication initiatives were genuine (including towards and inside business) but (...) not on a big enough scale” (CNEFOP, CEP 4 ans de mise en oeuvre - CNEFOP, 2018). In autumn 2016, less than a quarter of employees who had been in their posts for at least one year said that they had been informed of the existence of CEP by their business. Employees were unaware of the scheme and the support it could offer in discussions on their careers.

In addition, in order to mobilise the CPF, support staff had to advise potential users of the CPF, even though it was still unfamiliar to them and not entirely a known quantity (changes in OPCA coverage rates, choice of lists, etc.). This could well have been a problem for the financial engineering aspect of training. As the IGAS noted, “The process of making CEP support more professional within the meaning of the Law of 2014 is still considerably behind the operational level expected of it, namely help in drawing up the development project and then if necessary the engineering of training. Even if the scheme moves towards greater accessibility, the fact that individuals have autonomy means that, provided lasting momentum is the goal, there must be an opportunity for professional mediation between the employee, the employer, the funder and the training provider. Otherwise, the CPF may well replicate or increase unequal access to training” (IGAS, 2017).

## 5.2. CEP after the Law of 5 September 2018

While CEP had not yet found its marks among operators and its target group, the Law of 5 September 2018 changed its content when new specifications for it were published that entrusted the supply of this service, in respect of economically active persons in work, to the market.

Under the new specifications, CEP now had to be on two levels: a personalised welcome tailored to the person’s needs and personalised support. It had to result in a summary document for the person concerned to the effect that “the recipient has available to him a document which, in addition to noting the services received and a description of his career development project, sets out the strategy(ies) planned in order to implement it and an associated action plan covering where necessary the expected development path for the skills” (extract from the specifications published on 29 March 2019).

Although the Law of 5 September 2018 confirmed free access to careers development advice, it included one major change: the liberalisation of the market in CEP for economically active persons in work outside the public services. The FONGECIFs (the CEP operators for employees) disappear with the abolition of CIF. The Government therefore decided to launch a call for tenders based on national specifications<sup>82</sup> to select one service provider per region. They were to enter into operation on 1 January 2020, and the FONGECIFs (and OPACIFs) were tasked with continuing to deliver CEP to economically active persons in work in the meantime. The new operators will be funded through the collection of mutualised funds that will be channelled through *France Compétences* (the agency says that 4.2% of the collected funds would be allocated to it). The market in CEP operators is screened financially in order gradually to cover an

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<sup>82</sup> Cf. Order of 29 March 2019 laying down the specifications concerning the careers development advisory service provided for in Article L6111-6 of the Labour Code.

increasingly large number of recipients who were not covered by the FONGECIFs or OPACIFs (+20%/year over the four years of the contract). The list of operators selected by *France Compétences* was published in November 2019 (Box 5.1).

#### **Box 5.1. The operators selected to deliver CEP from 1 January 2020**

In seven regions (Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, New Aquitaine, Occitania, Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, Burgundy-Franche-Comté, Guadeloupe and Mayotte), the *Centres Interinstitutionnels de Bilan de Compétences* (Interinstitutional Skills Assessment Centres – CIBC) won the contract. The CIBCs are joint bodies that are organised into networks in the Regions and were established by the Ministry of Labour in 1986 to conduct skills assessments. While skills assessments might have appeared threatened by the move to bring CEP into the institutional fabric, the CIBCs appear to have sailed through and ensured their economic sustainability hitherto.

In three other regions, and not the least important ones (Île-de-France, Hauts-de-France and Centre-Loire Valley), the services of Tingari HR consultancies were retained. Tingari is a member of the international group INGEUS (with a presence in 13 countries) and has offices nationwide (400 employees, 80 sites in France). Under the name INGEUS, the consultancy has been a subcontractor to the public employment service, notably since the 2005 programme piloting the use of private service providers to help jobseekers back into work.

The smaller HR consultancy Catalys (100 employees and 30 sites mainly in Brittany) was successful in Pays de la Loire, Normandy and Brittany.

Finally, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI) of Meurthe and Moselle will be the CEP operator for the Grand Est region, and the consultancy Aksis will be the operator for Martinique.

Between 2014 and 2018, CEP gradually picked up momentum among economically active persons in work. The new CEP operators have objectives based on volume and the type of persons they want to attract; the onus is on them to develop strategies to find those people. The contract for CEP operators was financially gauged to cover a gradually greater number of recipients than when the service was provided by OPACIF-FONGECIFs (+20% per year for the four years of the contract). However, given the removal of the previous operators and the emergence of new ones that vary across the Regions, it is to be expected that use of CEP among economically active persons in work will slow down once again, at least initially, possibly to the detriment of the people who are furthest removed from training and have a relatively greater need for advice and support in developing their careers (the self-employed, SME employees, etc.). In addition, the FONGECIFs-OPACIFs had accumulated a degree of expertise in careers development advice and in financial engineering for training. The close relationship of sectoral OPACIFs with employment and skills problems was such as to foster informed, specialist advice for users (cf. the AFDAS OPACIF for freelance journalists or entertainment workers). What about the new operators? Cooperative relationships had been established over time between professional support and careers advice services operators (cf. the assessment reports by CÉREQ and CIREL). The opening up of this service to competition and the potential emergence of new, private-sector actors in the field is a source of uncertainty for the surviving operators.

Overall, according to the CPF evaluation conducted on behalf of DARES, as things stand, pairing the CPF with CEP did not leverage access to training. Take-up by employees has remained very low. As far as jobseekers are concerned, their dealings were with *Pôle Emploi*, which widely publicised their access to training (without providing information on CEP content).

## 6. Conclusion

The establishment of the CPF is a major milestone in the French continuing training system: it introduces an individualised scheme for funding certifications, therefore making them potentially transferable from one employer to another, or even from one industry to another.

Although initially strictly regulated by collective bodies, especially by sectors of industry *via* the OPCAs, the CPF underwent detailed amendment under the Law of 5 September 2018 that broadly handed the scheme over to free competition and the market (Perez, 2019). By monetising the account and allowing training to be purchased using the CPF with no middleman at all, the 2018 reform completed the shift to individualised access to training under the CPF.

The succession of major changes to the scheme explain in part why no thorough assessment has been conducted since 2014. Nonetheless, in the light of the information collated here (reports and other publications, interviews), it is possible to identify both the contributions made by the CPF to worker participation in training, and the scheme's limitations. To that end, as required under an assessment process, we shall attempt to compare what we know about the CPF's effects with its three stated objectives (before and after it was reformed), namely giving people autonomy in their training choices, refocusing the funding and provision of training towards raising qualifications, and reducing unequal access to training. Finally, we shall attempt to frame the CPF within the broader continuing training ecosystem.

### 6.1. Providing personal autonomy in the take-up and choice of training

Since 2014, one of the stated objectives of the CPF has been to encourage and implement personal autonomy in the take-up and choice of training.

Armed with hours in credit, the individual had a capacity for initiative and could therefore contact his employer/or the careers adviser to negotiate access to training. The negotiation could result in co-investment (e.g. training occurs during working hours mobilising the hours credited in the employee's account), or allow self-funding of training outside working hours (with or without supplementary contributions).

In reality, various barriers have obstructed individual moves to access training under the CPF:

- The complexities of the processes involved and the use of intermediaries in activating the CPF;
- Lack of support in mobilising the CPF (especially for “autonomous” use of the CPF i.e. without reference to the employer);
- lists of eligible certifications and the impossibility of using the CPF to fund training that is uncertified or results in a certification that is not included in the lists;
- The need for supplementary contributions (where there were not enough hours in credit) and the role of intermediaries (especially for jobseekers; see below).

It therefore proved difficult for employees to mobilise their accounts autonomously. Moreover, for jobseekers, activating the CPF required the agency of a *Pôle Emploi* advisor.

In that sense, the 2018 reform simplified “autonomous” mobilisation of the CPF for economically active persons in work.

Under the Law of 5 September 2018, the legislator’s intention was to make the CPF “the sole personal entitlement in the hands of individuals that draws on an approach based on direct ownership, in other words, an autonomous approach with no compulsory middleman” (extract from the impact study; our highlighting). Note that action by an intermediary (joint sectoral bodies, *Pôle Emploi*, etc.) was deemed to hinder workers’ capacity to act rather than a potential aid in mobilising the CPF. Indeed, monetisation (against the advice of the social partners) and the creation of the CPF mobile app are two solid decisions that encourage autonomous use of the account because users can now purchase training directly without having to obtain third-party validation.

What is the provision of autonomy expected to achieve? The underlying assumptions are that, as a result, training choices will match individuals’ aspirations more closely, and increase commitment to training (with a corresponding fall in the drop-out rate). Assessments of the scheme will have to be carried out to establish whether those aims have been achieved. It should be noted already that the CPF in its new guise, following removal of the middleman, could act as a disincentive to tackle the financial and pedagogical planning required (researching supplementary contributions, skills modules to be validated successively, etc.), in order to make lengthy or costly training happen (see the following point).

In the firm, the initial aim of the CPF was to prompt social dialogue on training through negotiating co-investment in training. The Law of 2018 provides for firms to be able to conclude collective agreements on CPF, e.g. training selected and funded by the employee but conducted in work time; eventually, the CPF app could inform the user of the certifications eligible for firm co-investment. The monetised CPF without the middleman that ensued from the 2018 reform following a compromise between the social partners completes the creation of an individualised scheme for funding training. It assumes that the person concerned has a career development project that would involve mobilising the CPF. In the absence of a project, the account will either remain unutilised, or be utilised only for short training courses that the individual might have been able to pay for himself; or be mobilised indirectly by the firm (or *Pôle Emploi*).

The idea of an individual training account is that, by giving a worker the power to act, he is encouraged to be proactive in improving his employability, especially in relation to job mobility options he selects and experiences. But is autonomy in access to training all that is required in order to construct and implement a career development project? Without professional guidance and support services, it is questionable whether the autonomy provided genuinely empowers the individual (Perez, *Avec le Compte Personnel de Formation: l'avènement d'une logique marchande et désintermédiation*, 2019). Furthermore, it even risks putting the employee in what can generously be described as an uncomfortable position: making him take on the responsibility for maintaining his employability, like a “businessman whose business is himself (...) having to manage the ‘risks’ of working and economic life as if they are natural risks that each individual is to face in a responsible way” (Laval et al., 2011). Responsible for its use, its non-use, even its misuse, the “CPF-bearing adult will ironically be autonomous by empowerment and by order (...)” (Boutinet, 2019).

## 6.2. Refocusing the funding and supply of training on raising qualifications

The second objective of the CPF was to enable people to upskill by guiding their choices (and the supply of training) towards qualifying training.

There are two ways that upskilling can be achieved for an individual: either by funding a fairly long period of training, or by planning a sequence of training over time such that skills modules/packages are acquired which, taken together, lead to a certificate or a diploma.

The data available for the period 2015-2018 showed that the bulk of certifications funded by the CPF were not at any specific level for employees and were short in duration, and that the same has increasingly been true for jobseekers. Indeed, as a result of the rising cost of the scheme and the depletion of supplementary payments, hours of credit or (now) the sums available under the CPF in the strict sense are not sufficient to fund lengthy training. The abolition of supplementary contributions from OPCOs following the reform is likely to further accentuate this trend for employees.

In any event, in order to undergo lengthy training, most individuals need a replacement income during the training period. This was possible under CIF until December 2018, but CIF covered only a small number of people (Section 1. ). From January 2019, individuals who want to change job or profession, i.e. retrain, will be able to request access to the Career Change Project (PTP). There will therefore no longer be any funding available for projects to raise skills as part of an ongoing career. The number of people who can receive funding under a PTP is likely to be much smaller.<sup>83</sup>

It is still possible in theory to upskill incrementally using VAE and/or gradual acquisition of skills modules. Hitherto, this possibility would appear to have been underused in practice. As the IGAS noted, few employees have the skills for self-promotion and career projection to drive a training project for more than two or three years (IGAS, 2017). Moreover, the introduction of skills modules, while attractive in theory, would appear to be very laborious in practice. According to a study by Céreq, “without overall regulation, the construction of the modules could increase the patchy nature of the skills and knowledge of people on the labour market and is likely to balkanise the certification system” (Amat, et al., 2017). It will be interesting to observe with a degree of detachment how effective the skills packages are in building individual training pathways, which will in future be funded by the CPF.

The issue also arises whether some of the CPF-funded training is replacing employer-funded training, in which case it would not amount to genuine upskilling for workers. As was clear from the Scottish individual learning scheme (OECD, 2019), some of the CPF-funded training is required by law in order to work in certain sectors/roles (accreditation in electricians, chemical hazard, CACES, etc.). Since such training was put on the list of CPF-eligible training, businesses that previously financed it from their training budgets may have been induced to encourage their employees to mobilise their CPFs; in particular, jobseekers have been able to take training that boosts their recruitment chances because it reduces the need for businesses to fund it after taking them on.

By abolishing potential OPCA/OPCO co-funding for training implemented by firms with more than 50 employees, even when their training contributions remains unchanged (1% of the payroll for businesses with more than 11 employees, 0.55% below that threshold), the

<sup>83</sup> See Section 2.3.2.

2018 reform accentuates the falling return on investment from training contributions paid by firms with over 50 employees. There is therefore a risk that this will increase the incentive for employers to rely on their employees' CPFs to fund training that is an employer's responsibility under the training plan, as already demonstrated by the IGAS at the time of the preceding reform (IGAS, 2017).

In order to make it possible for individuals to upskill in a liberalised, individualised training environment, it is also essential to ensure the quality of the training provision.

The recent move to compulsory, single certification goes some way to remedying the issues observed during the first phase of CPF implementation, namely the proliferation of certificates and labels and the heterogeneity of guarantees involved. However, although compulsory, single certification makes it possible to ascertain the compliance of certain procedures implemented by training bodies, it is not sufficient to ensure the quality of the training imparted as such. Listening to and supporting a trainee in order to identify his training needs, appropriate training content and teaching methods are also important factors in ensuring quality. Some indicators in the quality benchmark standard cover these points, but the factors at stake are not always easily measurable, especially for an individual. The evaluation by public funders downstream of training actions and their outcomes and the manner in which the results of the evaluations are communicated to the public will therefore remain of key importance.

A further risk of the reform is that it will lead to the standardisation of training provision, which is not necessarily synonymous with quality. As noted above, it is likely that small providers will struggle to survive compulsory certification. Moreover, selling training services to individuals rather than to businesses or public funders requires the training provider to be able to supply these services continually; this is a difficult task for small providers and could lead to their focusing on the most demanded/profitable training. There is therefore a real risk that the diversity of training provision will be depleted, innovation reduced, and that unusual or customised training, which is closely associated with trades, will disappear.

Moreover, the requirement for training to be of a given quality carries a cost. But it is not necessarily easy for individuals with a limited sum in their CPFs to choose not to go with the cheapest provider. *France Compétences* should monitor, observe and account for the costs of all training funded from public mutualised funds. "Transparencyy" could involve publication of average costs or ranges, provided that doing so is not inconsistent with the objective of liberalising provision. It is likely to be important for the regulator to make full use of the opportunity provided for in the law to publish relevant price ranges.

Finally, guiding provision towards upskilling cannot rely solely on the market (individuals and training providers). As the Court of Auditors noted in its report on the training of jobseekers, constructing customised training provision also requires firms and industries to look ahead to the changing trades and skills that they will need (Cour des comptes, 2018); the anticipated changes must be reflected specifically in training provision; and a discussion must be held on the channels of communication that must be set up to that end.

### 6.3. Reduce unequal access to training

Reducing unequal access to training is an objective that all personal training accounts share, whether in France, Austria or the United States (OECD, 2019).

The implicit assumption is that there is latent demand among individuals that needs to be tapped into in order to lead to genuine engagement in training. For employees, hours (later euros) of credit would offset businesses' lack of investment in the least qualified and employees in SMEs, etc. For jobseekers, the CPF should promote access to training without having to wait for any instruction from *Pôle Emploi*.

While some accounts target only those populations that are furthest removed from training (such as in Scotland or Flanders; see OECD, 2019), the CPF singles them out by allocating higher credit (in hours then euros) to the least skilled workers (in this case, those without a Level V diploma such as the CAP or the BEP). Moreover, the law provides for enhanced funding (through supplementary contributions) for certain categories of workers (disabled, unskilled, etc.) through various stakeholders (Region, *Pôle Emploi*, OPCA, etc.). Finally, the social partners have provided for payments into the accounts of jobseekers who have not accrued training hours in advance.

The CPF addresses the matter of disparities in training access first by granting each member of the workforce funding for training, including those people who have traditionally had limited access to training in firms, and then by awarding more (hours or euros) to those with a relatively low level of education. However, as has been demonstrated (see point 3.1.2), that is not enough: the same inequalities in access to training funded by the CPF are found as under other schemes, they may even be more acute under the CPF. This outcome is consistent with observations in other countries that have implemented individual training accounts (OECD, 2019, *op. cit.*).

It may be that financial constraints are not completely alleviated when the hours in credit are not enough to take up training, and that there is a need to find additional funds (and therefore mobilise social capital, etc.), or even to self-fund a share of the training (economic capital). Therefore, is the EUR 3 000 differential (over 10 years) awarded to the least skilled workers enough to offset the barriers they encounter? By the same token, questions can be asked about the role of CPF-funded training for the most skilled workers. How appropriate is the collective funding of language certification for executives? Is there not a deadweight effect in respect of people who could have provided funding from their own resources? And, if so, how large is it?

The definition of targeting could also be debated: defining the “least skilled” as persons who do not have a diploma or who merely have a *brevet des collèges* (French certificate of general education) leads to narrower targeting. In 2015, 2016 and 2017, people in these groups accounted on average for 12% of initial training leavers (10% of girls and 15% of boys; source: Insee, *Bilan Formation-Emploi*, November 2019). Once on the labour market, these workers experience high rates of unemployment: 15.5% in 2019 (compared to 8.4% for the whole labour force in France; source: Insee). Although the holders of a CAP and/or a BEP (specialist job-specific post-18 school-leaver qualifications) have a skill, this does not shield them from unemployment: 9.1% of them are unemployed in 2019. Unemployment among holders of just a *baccalauréat* (traditional post-18 school-leaver qualification) is similar (9.2% in 2019), but there are significant differences depending on the type of *baccalauréat* (general, technological or professional). A debate on the nature of the targeting (and any differential awarded) is therefore likely to be required in order to correct the unequal access to CPF-funded training.

Moving beyond the features of the CPF as a scheme (amount credited, targeting), the persistence of unequal access questions the inherent assumption upon which the CPF is based, specifically in respect of its unskilled or low-skilled “audience”: relaxing the financial constraints would help to remove the chief barrier to the take-up of training. On

the one hand, questioning the driving force behind training take-up involves consideration of the professional prospects that low-skilled people can envisage for themselves if they undergo training. In fact, training is not (or is only rarely) an end in itself (Perez, 2009; 2014). On the other hand, updating and building an outlook for future professional development that would provide a direction for a training project assumes a range of upstream provision of access to training that has never worked well in France.

The establishment of CEP is one aspect of the assistance available to people who want to mobilise their accounts, especially the least skilled. It is therefore *per se* an interesting response to the need people feel for guidance and support in the training jungle. On the one hand, the fact that CEP and the CPF were established at the same time unquestionably encouraged operators to increase their capacity to provide career support and guidance. Yet, on the other, the fact that CEP was established with no change in resources for operators was not perhaps the best way to address the challenges. In addition, opening CEP for employees up to competition further differentiated ownership of this role by the parties concerned (not only the various statuses and trades covered by the selected operators) and raised issues concerning the process of putting CEP on a more professional footing (Laroye-Carré & Mayen, 2019). The budget allocated in 2020 for CEP for the economically active person in work has been calibrated to cater for a growing number of workers (+20%/year). However, it will still be necessary to reach those people. Otherwise, the CPF is likely to replicate or even increase unequal access to training.

The assistance that firms can provide to their employees is a determining factor, especially in terms of the opportunity to train and draw up a funding request (Brunet & Rieucan, 2019). Existing research illustrates the importance of a professional environment in spreading information on training, especially by holding career interviews, which, although compulsory under the Law of 2014, are highly dependent on the size of a firm and the employee's skill level (Guillemot & Sigot, 2018). Interestingly, bodies representing staff definitely have a more active role to play in better informing employees of the training opportunities available to them (Dubois & Véro, 2019).

Note that information, advice and guidance are necessary not only to increase awareness of the CPF and facilitate its usage, but also to provide input into a training project and its end purpose. The risk of leaving a person to tackle the training "market" alone, in other words faced with a myriad training bodies, lies in training funds being spent on "fashionable" roles or trades that have no genuine economic prospects or links to changes in the system of production.

#### 6.4. Placing the CPF scheme within its eco-system

Although unquestionably symbolic of personalised access to training in France, the CPF is just one of several means of funding training for workers. For instance, in 2017, EUR 26.3 billion were allocated to continuing vocational training and learning (excluding direct expenditure by firms, in other words excluding training that was fully funded by firms under their training plans) (source: Jaune Budgétaire, 2020). It is clear that CPF expenditure (excluding management costs) accounted for only 2.4% of that sum in 2017.

Therefore, although innovative, the CPF is not the only funding channel for workers' training.

For jobseekers, the CPF appears to be "just another" channel to fund training alongside others to which intermediaries in the public employment service have recourse as part of their financial planning role, risking a spread of resources that some experts would prefer

to see focused on the least skilled workers; (Santelmann, 2019). For instance, the reform of the CPF should extend the Skills Investment Plan (PIC) launched at end-2017 and thus supplement the effect of the EUR 15 billion invested over five years in training and upskilling one million young people and the same number again of jobseekers. Other experiments are also under way to move young people into the workplace and return the unemployed to employment, such as the *Garantie Jeunes* (Young Persons' Guarantee) for 16-25 year olds who are not in employment or training and the *Territoires Zéro Chômeur de Longue Durée* (Zero Long-Term Unemployment Zones) launched by ATD Fourth World in 10 areas with 5 000-10 000 inhabitants since January 2017.

From the employees' side, firms are (and must continue to be) a key vehicle for training employees through their skills development plans. Note that the Law of 5 September 2018 restates the employer's duty to ensure that employees are provided with the skills appropriate for their job, retain their ability to perform a job, especially in view of technological developments, and are redeployed in the event of job cuts. This requires employers to take charge of funding this training. It is nonetheless possible that, as happened with the DIF, employers may seek to transfer a share of the training cost to the employee by encouraging him to use his CPF (see Section 6.2). However, this is difficult to evaluate because it has not been possible to monitor the financial training effort (in the sense of direct expenditure) since the disappearance of the statutory obligation in 2014.

By defining a training action as a “teaching pathway that enables a work-related objective to be met” (...) and can, in part, be conducted remotely or in the workplace, the Law of 5 September 2018 encourages the development of more varied methods of teaching than face-to-face training (classes and placements) that so typify France, which is described as a “single-trainer” country (Mignot, 2013) These methods of learning could reduce disparities in access to training. In that regard, one new aspect that adds to the CPF is the promotion of work-based training under the Law of 5 September 2018. This follows an experiment in Work-Based Training Actions (AFEST) piloted by the General Delegation for Employment and Vocational Training between 2015 and 2018. AFEST is based on repeated two-part stints, one in a work-based situation that is prepared and organised for teaching purposes, and one in the form of a discussion led by a third party. AFEST would therefore appear to act as a lever to convert work experience into skills. It is also likely to facilitate training for the least-skilled staff and those working in microenterprises and SMEs.

The profusion of training methods and funding channels for training illustrates that the building of individual professional pathways is a process that emerges from institutional ecosystems (on guidance, support and training) and organisational ecosystems (business as a place for learning and professional development opportunities) among which the CFP is yet to find its place.

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## Annex A.

**Table A A.1. People interviewed in person (or by telephone\*)**

Mathilde GAINI, Head Cindy BALMAT, Researcher	DARES [Directorate for Research, Studies and Statistics]	09/05/2018
Marc-Antoine ESTRADE Paul SANTELMANN, Director	FPSP [Joint Fund for Safeguarding Career Paths] Association for Adult Vocational Training (AFPA) "Emploi et Qualifications" Survey	07/06/2018 08/06/2018
Vincent CIBOIS, Head of Project	DGEFP [General Delegation for Employment and Vocational Training]	16/06/2018
Grégoire LECLERC*, President Frédérique DAVID*, Treasurer	Fédération des Auto-Entrepreneurs (Federation of Self-Employed Workers) (FEDae)	03/07/2018
Michèle TALLARD, Chair	CNEFP [National Council for the Assessment of Vocational Training]	05/07/2018
Pierre CARLONI, Researcher	CNEFP	
Natacha DJANI, Head	DGEFP [General Delegation for Employment and Vocational Training]	05/07/2018
Rémi MATHOU, Legal Expert	DGEFP	
Nicole MAGGI-GERMAIN, Lecturer/Researcher, Legal Expert	Université de Paris 1, ISST	11/07/2018
Laurent DURAIN, Director	Caisse des Dépôts, Skills Training Directorate	12/07/2018
Mathilde BOURDAT	CEGOS [training provider]	26/07/2018
Thierry TEBOUL, Director	AFDAS [an OPCO for artists and authors]	28/08/2018
Bruno BERTOLI Karine DARTOIS	FPSP FPSP	28/08/2018
Christelle CHAUDRON	FONGECIF [Regional OPACIF] Rhône-Alpes / Auvergne	
Arnaud CARTRON*	IRCANTEC, CDC (06-2018)	28/08/2018
Véronique DELUERMOZ	FAF-TT [training fund for agency workers]	10/09/2018
Audrey PERROCHEAU, Director	<i>Pôle Emploi</i> [Public Employment Service] Formation et développement des compétences dans les territoires [Skills Training and Development in the Regions]	05/11/2018
Vincent DERICHEBOURG	Contructys [an OPCO]	05/11/2018
Gabrielle HOPPE, Project Director Rémy MATHOU, Legal Expert Laurent BLANC	DGEFP	21/05/2019
Béatrice DELAY*	<i>France Compétences</i> [public agency in charge of regulating and financing vocational training and apprenticeships]	06/02/202

**Table A A.2. Participation in non-formal training for professional purposes during the past 12 months for people in employment in 2016**

**2. Participation à la formation non formelle à but professionnel au cours des 12 derniers mois des personnes en emploi en 2016**

	en %		
	Femmes	Hommes	Ensemble
<b>Statut d'emploi à la date de l'enquête</b>			
Non-salariés	40	29	33
Salariés	51	51	51
<i>dont : CDI, fonctionnaires</i>	52	52	52
<i>CDD</i>	40	38	39
<i>dont : public</i>	62	60	62
<i>privé</i>	45	45	45
<b>Catégorie socioprofessionnelle</b>			
Agriculteurs exploitants	34	27	30
Artisans, commerçants et chefs d'entreprise	33	22	25
Cadres et professions intellectuelles supérieures	70	63	66
Professions intermédiaires	64	59	61
Employés	39	52	42
Ouvriers	32	35	35
<b>Taille de l'établissement<sup>1</sup></b>			
De 1 à 9 salariés	39	35	37
De 10 à 19 salariés	51	44	47
De 20 à 49 salariés	52	50	51
De 50 à 249 salariés	55	55	55
250 salariés ou plus	63	61	62
<b>Ensemble</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>49</b>

1. Champ restreint aux salariés.

Champ : France métropolitaine, personnes âgées de 18 à 64 ans, sorties de formation initiale, en emploi à la date de l'enquête.

Lecture : 33 % des non-salariés âgés de 18 à 64 ans ont participé à au moins une formation non formelle à but professionnel au cours des 12 derniers mois.

Source : Insee, enquête Formation des adultes 2016.

Source: Insee Références, Formation et Emploi, 2018 Edition.

**Table A A.3. Contribution as a % of businesses' payroll**

Tableau 1 : Contribution en % de la masse salariale des entreprises

sections	1 à 10 salariés	11 à 49 salariés	50 à 299 salariés	300 salariés et plus
Plan de formation	0,40 %	0,20 %	0,10 %	-
CPF	-	0,20 %	0,20 %	0,20 %
Professionnalisation	0,15 %	0,30 %	0,30 %	0,40 %
CIF	-	0,15 %	0,20 %	0,20 %
FPSPP	-	0,15 %	0,20 %	0,20 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>0,55 %</b>	<b>1 %</b>	<b>1 %</b>	<b>1 %</b>

Source : *Loi du 5 mars 2014*

*Source:* The funding of training following the Law of 5 March 2014. Extract from the IGAS Report, 2017, p. 15.