

**26th Conference of the International Working Party on Segmentation
Theory**

“The Dynamics of National Models of Employment”

Berlin, 8-11 September 2005

.....
Recent Dynamics of the French School-to-Work Transition System
.....

Very Draft Version – do not quote

Nathalie Moncel

CEREQ, Marseille - France

+33 4 91 13 28 53

moncel@cereq.fr

Transitions from school-to-work are specific moments in individual trajectories on labour markets; they can also be considered as specific features of employment regimes in the way that they represent entry flows of new labour force into labour markets. As Detzel and Rubery (2002) noted, diversity in school-to-work transition patterns across countries *“is a product not only (or even mainly) of the overall level of labour demand but of the institutional arrangements or societal systems that create different paths or transition for young people seeking to enter the labour market”* (p.107).

Following an institutional approach, comparative research on young people’s transitions from school-to-work has recently produced cross-national studies and typologies that prove to be useful in order to cluster groups of countries into types of transition regime (OECD, 2000, Ryan, 2001; Muller, Gangl, 2003; Walther, 2005). These approaches articulate several dimensions to describe national or typical models : educational institutions and their relatedness to the labour market, labour market regulation, social and labour market policies, family and gender relations.

One of the limits of typological approach consists in difficulties to take into consideration dynamics and transformation processes. Focusing on the French case, this paper attends to shed light on processes of changes in order to question consistency of a national model that has been confronted with the main challenge of persistent high levels of youth unemployment. More precisely, the focus is on transformations that occurred in two of the main spheres participating in the institution of the transition regime.

In a first point, major changes in the French educational and vocational training system for the last twenty years are presented : prolongation of education time and increase in levels of certification ; extension of vocational training in terms of diversity of curricula; development of higher education. These trends have been stabilised in the late 1990s, and the issue is to assess to what extent they have changed the French education regime (Verdier, 2001).

The second point of the paper examines how labour market policies have been playing a major role since the mid-70s. From a comparative view point, the defining feature of the French transition system is indeed the scale of public intervention developing a huge variety of schemes targeted to young people. Over the time, several stages can be distinguished in the evolution of labour market policies; they depend on evolving diagnostics and political orientations and result in swings between schemes aiming to improve youth training versus schemes aiming to reduce youth labour costs. Overall, there is a progressive institutionalisation of the space between school and work through the implementation of devices and local institutions that channel young people towards employment but also organise a growing part of the labour market. The impact of public schemes on school leavers’ trajectories is all but straight forward to assess in terms of access to jobs and quality of integration into the employment system.

The third part of the paper provides insights on changes in interactions between economic actors on the youth labour market, mainly young people and employers, by examining how conditions of entry into the French labour market have evolved, using different indicators to emphasize the specificity of young school-leavers when they become part of the labour force : selectivity of access to jobs, vulnerability to unemployment, polarisation in flexible employment forms and specific activities. Some regular patterns of school-to-work transition have been characterised; however trajectories of school leavers are all but homogeneous; qualification and gender as well as characteristics of first steps within employment systems are major factors of differentiation in trajectories.

1. Evolution in the French Educational System : “Massification”, diversification and rise in educational levels

From the 1960s until the mid-1990s, the French educational system experienced major growth connected with the extension of the length of the schooling period, a massive influx into secondary education and then into higher education. In comparison with other European countries, the French education system is characterised by the principle of the “single college”: a single teaching body, an identical syllabus and very similar teaching methods. The dual mission and also the difficulty of this unified compulsory education model is to offer a high standard of education to everyone whilst at the same time integrating the diversity of individual situations. Another specific feature of the French educational system is that full-time school education is the norm¹. Although the share of pupils occupying jobs while studying is growing, this phenomenon mainly concerns higher education students into vacation jobs (Céreq, 2002).

The first growth in education during the mid-60s and the second one in the mid-80s are both to be related to political decisions to set education as a national priority. The July 1989 Guideline Act (*Loi d’Orientation de Juillet 1989*) set two major objectives : to provide young people with a minimum qualification, and to advance 80% of pupils to *baccalauréat* level (second stage of secondary school certification). Following this political will, several major reforms in the educational system were taken to increase education and training supply, to diversify qualifications and credentials, especially vocational ones; and to develop higher education.

Since the end of the 1980s, three school segments - general, technological and vocational - have grown in parallel and all lead or can lead to the *baccalauréat*. Actually, the rise in the number of *baccalauréat* school leavers is mainly due to the development of the vocational segment and the access to general *baccalauréat* has fallen below 35% of pupils from 1997 onwards. The *baccalauréat* has therefore become more diversified: it is not longer just an academic qualification covering traditional secondary education but a group of diploma covering various segments of the second stage of secondary education.

However, the hierarchies between educational segments and within these segments, between series or specialisations, are still highly marked by and reflect several levels of prestige. The general segment is still considered as the most prestigious one and the main one to get access to university degrees. The vocational school segment offers alternation between periods of school study and periods of on-the-job training at a company. The strong movement towards “vocationalisation” of basic education at secondary school level (CAP-BEP, “*Baccalauréat Professionnel*”) has also reached higher education in the form of vocational degrees (for instance “*licence professionnelle*” or master degrees such as DESS).

The school form of vocational training through apprenticeship was introduced in 1945 and has been through cyclical evolution, with a steady decline from the mid-60s till the beginning of the 1990s. Whereas it used to just relate to the first stage certification in secondary school (CAP-BEP), its usage started to diversify in the 1990s, especially under the 1993 Employment Act². All forms of technical and vocational education can now in principle be studied for under an apprenticeship which can also be used to obtain university diploma, engineering

¹ Thus, the expected number of years schooling for a 5 year-old child in 2000 was 16,5 years full-time and 0 year part-time in France; 14,6 years fulltime and 4,3 years part-time in the UK.

² More recently, the French government reaffirms the target of 500 000 trainees in apprenticeship in 2009. Registered apprenticeship contracts were up to 360 000 in 2001.

qualifications and equivalents. There is nowadays a vivid growth in the number of pupils studying for vocational baccalauréats and technical diplomas through apprenticeship. The proportion of these levels of training is constantly increasing and in 2000-2001 accounted for 33% of apprentices. Consequently, the level of basic education on entry into apprenticeship is also rising: now half of the apprentices have already reached a level equal to the first stage secondary school level (CAP-BEP).

After decades of continuing progress therefore, the trend of increase in education appear to stop: the increase in pupils and students population slows down firstly because of the demographic decline, however qualitative shifts are operating as well. Nowadays, almost all the generation complete secondary school but the number of pupils going on to take the baccalauréat has stopped rising since 1995. Access by a generation to the level of baccalauréat or equivalent doubled between 1980 and 1994; in recent years it remains at around 70%. The structure of educational levels when leaving school displays few changes over the last decade (Graph 1). Since 1995, 37% of young people passed a higher education qualification (level III to I in the French nomenclature) whereas the figure was only 29% in 1991.

Actually, despite the rise in baccalauréat, the number of pupils entering higher education is also keeping pace because the growing proportion of pupils passing the vocational baccalauréat do not intend to continue their education. Another feature relates to the difficulty to succeed and progress in higher education; the drop out rate from tertiary study is high : around 11% of school leavers are classified with a level “IV sup” that is related to young people having taken higher education after the baccalauréat but without passing higher certification.

GRAPH 1 AROUND HERE

Conversely, over the last decade, there has been a stable proportion of 8 to 9% of pupils leaving school without any qualification (level Vbis-VI in graph 1), and 18% without any form of certification (this figure includes the share of young people leaving secondary school with no diploma). Thus, the number of pupils leaving school without any form of qualification is no longer falling and despite considerable progress in recent decades, the French education system has not eliminated the hard core of school failures which often occur as early as primary school.

Raising the issue of a structural change in the French “educational regime” that would result from the reforms implemented over the last two decades, Verdier (2001) proposed a negative answer using the two criteria of equity and efficiency.

In terms of equity, reforms in education did not manage to solve social inequalities. The outcomes from education remain highly dependent on social origins. The considerable rise in the standard of teaching has undoubtedly benefited children from all spheres; now the option of entering higher education is available to over half of the young generations. Despite this opening and democratisation of education, there are still many social inequalities: higher education levels are only 20% amongst children of manual workers, compared with 80% for children of managers or professionals. Differentiation and hierarchy amongst training paths, both in terms of level and speciality, are still very pronounced and influent for the access to higher education and employment.

Other disparities in school trajectories are related to a relatively gendered system : boys and girls continue to follow different paths in education. Girls form the majority of pupils completing the *baccalauréat* and going on to become students. They are highly over-represented in literary education (accounting for around 85% of *baccalauréat* “Literary” passes and for over three-quarters of DEUG arts degree enrolments) and the tertiary sector whereas boys are in the majority in technical, industrial and scientific sectors, except for health.

In terms of efficiency, Verdier (2001) underlined several limitations confronted by the new forms of educational system. Firstly, the value of vocational qualifications and certifications on the labour market remains limited since there is still no strong institutional support for an occupational labour market arrangement (especially because of a weak involvement of social partners). Secondly, the downgrading process through which qualified young people enter low skilled jobs, can be characterised as an over production of qualified young people in regards to actual changes in the employment structure in terms of skills. Obviously, high levels of unemployment contribute to strengthen competition for access to job and the production of higher levels of education has not influenced the high vulnerability of youth employment to economic downturn. Competition on the labour market has actually increased between more qualified school leavers and more numerous experienced mobile workers.

2. Development of Labour Market Policies and Integration Programmes

Youth transition from school-to-work has become a long and complex process that results from the interplay between different actors : young people, their families, teachers, companies, local authorities, professional organisations. The successive governments have been major players in the last decades through the development of labour market policies targeted towards young people. A short history of these policies reveals a constant swing between different logics of public intervention : social treatment against youth unemployment; development of training and skills; implementation of specific employment status. Most frequently, labour market policies mix these different goals.

In the mid-1970s, when young unemployment sharply grew, the aim was to improve adequacy between training and jobs. In the early-1980s, labour market policies were predominantly aiming to develop employment-cum-training contracts for young people. It was also by this time that integration programmes were developed to act on social dimensions of youth integration through the setting of local structures, besides the public employment services, to support young people entering the labour market (*Missions Locales, PAIO-Permanences d'Accueil, d'Information et d'Orientation*).

The main innovative action of the last socialist government to fight youth unemployment was to develop subsidised public jobs (“Emplois Jeunes”) in the late 1990s in order to counterbalance a growing unemployment amongst qualified young people. And finally, the new government has experimented several forms of subsidised employment (CJE-Contrat Jeunes Enterprise, CIE-Contrat Initiative Emploi) with no major changes in the logic of intervention on the labour market.

As a result, the existing current measures targeted to young people, who represent half of the LM policies beneficiaries, act on the two sides of the labour market with the twofold objective to improve youth training and to reduce youth labour costs. And there has been for twenty

years now, a progressive institutionalisation of the space between school and work through the implementation of devices and local institutions that channel young people towards employment.

When considering the impact of LM policies on the transition system, it is worth to distinguish two forms of public intervention on the youth labour market : those schemes that are implemented through employment contract ; and those that are not supported by employment contract.

2.1. Labour Market policy schemes creating employment forms specific to young people

Forms of employment introduced by labour market policies run specifically for young people, in this case the 16-25 age group, are typically employment contract with specific rules in terms of wage determination, working time regulation, training, and including labour cost reduction and/or subsidies for the employers. According to the *Génération 98*³ survey, 15% of the school leavers went through "subsidised employment" at least one time during their first three years of working life. At the end of 2001, 36% of youth employment (under 26-year-olds) was under various LM schemes (Graph 2).

INSERT GRAPH 2 AROUND HERE

Three main categories of LM schemes are in use.

- Employment contracts cum training

They are the most numerous form of labour market schemes developing alternating training (*formations en alternance*) supported by a contract of employment. They are designed to address a need for adjustment between training and employment and in some cases, they are the best way for completing schooling. Any young person should be able to apply for vocational training under the alternating training scheme. The three main types of alternating training are described in box 1.

- Subsidised private jobs

This category relates to employment contracts providing subsidies and exemptions of national insurance contributions for part-time jobs, first recruitments and other various job specifications in terms of activities, company size, or duration of unemployment, etc... It should be noted that other labour market policy schemes, reducing labour cost but not specifically targeted to young people, have nevertheless an influent role as their aim is to reduce labour costs for employment offering a wage levels under 1.8 time the minimum wage, that is to say the employment segment where is concentrated the majority of jobs dedicated to young people. These subsidised private jobs are not accounted for in graph 2.

- Subsidised public jobs

Public jobs deviating from civil servant status have been cyclically developed for fighting unemployment. Till recently, the most frequent form targeted to young people was "Emploi

³ *Génération 98* is a survey that was carried out by Céreq amongst a representative sample of 55,000 young people who left the educational system in 1998 and who were questioned in 2001 and in 2003. Main results are available in Céreq (2002), downloadable in the website : <http://www.cereq.fr>.

jeune” which was created in 1997 and concerned more than 150 000 young people in 2001. It is a private contract signed with public bodies for either a fixed term period of 60 months or with an open-end. Most of the young people who entered this type of contract were qualified school leavers with at least the baccalauréat level, the vast majority of these contracts were signed by educational bodies or associative corporations.

Box 1 : Three main type of employment-cum-training forms

The Apprenticeship contract (230 000 inflows in 2003)

Apprenticeship contracts have doubled in 15 years; they continued to rise till 2000 in a manner that is generally independent of the economy - whereas other alternating contracts promoted through labour market policies for young people followed the general labour market very closely. Apprenticeship contracts constitute the most numerous type of alternating training schemes, especially for secondary school leavers, although a rising part of new apprenticeship contracts are signed by young people who passed the *Baccalauréat*. Apprenticeship is still concentrated in several areas of activity: occupations and sectors with the highest degree of craftsmanship always offer the main training under an apprenticeship even though the relative proportion of these traditional crafts sectors is slightly decreasing. Similarly, small enterprises still form the preferred area for apprenticeship: 72% of contracts are signed in companies with less than 10 employees, large or medium-sized enterprises - particularly in the industrial sector - have few openings for apprenticeships. But the rise in apprenticeships is greater in new sectors than in the traditional ones, and supports upper level training in large or medium-sized enterprises in capital goods, intermediate goods and business services.

The *Contrat de Qualification* (110 000 inflows in 2003)

The *Contrat de Qualification (CQ)*, introduced in 1983, is a fixed-term contract of between 6 and 24 months. Initially targeted towards the 16-25 years old, the CQ has recently, however, been extended to over-26s, who did not obtain any qualifications at school or whose qualifications do not give them access to employment. It includes training that covers at least 25% of the total term of the contract. This training is meant to result in a vocational certification (diploma in technological or vocational studies, or a qualification approved or recognised under a sector agreement).

15% of the CQ are signed in industry - the importance of industry is, however, continuously falling; three-quarters are in the services sector of which 28% in commerce and 30% in business and consumer services. Nearly half of the CQs are in companies with less than 10 employees.

The *Contrat d'Adaptation* (40 000 inflows in 2003)

The *Contrat d'Adaptation (CA)* is another alternating training which aims to facilitate the employment of young jobseekers by providing a minimum of 200 hours training to adapt the young people's qualification in order to take up an employment position in a company as quickly as possible. It is either in the form of a fixed-term contract of between 6-12 months or a permanent contract.

The proportion of industry is higher than for the CQ: 33% of CA are in industry. The size of the companies using CAs is considerably bigger: 18% of the CAs are in companies with less than 10 employees and 22% in companies with over 500 employees.

2.2. Labour market policies with no creation of specific employment contract

The “decentralisation” or “territorialisation” of labour market and training policies has broadened and diversified the participants in the school-to-work transition process. One of the major changes over the past twenty years is indeed the appearance of new participants - local structures, regional councils, local authorities, local employment services etc. - alongside the traditional insertion participants. These new participants develop more particularly programmes targeted to young people with strong difficulties on the labour market; they are managed by local social structures (Missions Locales, PAIO) which provide young people with advices, training and employment experiences under the status of trainees.

Some of the services provided are very similar to social policies schemes, such as housing subsidies or health support. Actually, young people under 25 in France are excluded from any social minimum income scheme (such as *RMI : revenu minimum d'insertion*). Moreover, eligibility to unemployment benefit is conditioned by an employment qualificatory period of 4 months minimum⁴. Those young people who haven't been in employment long enough, or who have cumulated short term contracts, are thus compelled to relate to integration schemes managed by local social structures.

2.3. The Impact of Labour Market Schemes on Youth Trajectories

As for other types of labour market policies, assessment of the impact of youth programmes in terms of job creation is very delicate to carry out because of interaction between several effects (dead-weight or windfall effect, changes in competition within the job queue ...). At a micro-level, a recent research using panel data provides a quite complete evaluation of the impact of LM schemes on school-to-work transitions for young people with secondary level education (Giret, Lopez, 2005).

72% of secondary school leavers in 1994 went through at least one labour market scheme, and it was in the frame of a specific employment-cum-training contract in two cases out of three. The entry into programmes occurred quite early in the trajectories as these schemes are directly targeted to job search period. However, a strong result is that 43% of those who have experimented one scheme will enter into another one few months later.

There is a clear cut segmentation between schemes with and without employment contract : way of access, type of jobs and activities are clearly different and more favourable to insertion in the first case. The rate of return to non-subsidised employment is as high as 85%, the rate of long-term employment is slightly lower than for young people who did not enter public schemes, and there are no visible difference in terms of access to skilled jobs. However, within the population going through these schemes, there are important differences in terms of access to stable and skilled jobs : this is harder for females trainees, leaving tertiary training, entering schemes with no employment contract.

Overall, as it has been highlighted by other evaluations (Ryan, 2001), there is a positive impact of public schemes on young people unemployment as they do increase employment prospects. However in terms of their impact on school-to-work transition, these policies do not counterbalance selective processes on the labour market : the best schemes benefit to those young school leavers who may have not needed them in order to find a job (Giret, Lopez, 2005). It seems then difficult to conclude that there has been a structural change in transition processes as a result of LM policies development. On the contrary, it may be the case that integration schemes participate in global changes in the French employment system: these schemes act on the labour force mobility and renewal through the organisation of school-to-work pathways while conciliating with flexibility and reduction of labour costs that are supposed to favour job creation. This hypothesis fits quite well with the well-known polarisation of the young labour force on some specific segments of the labour market.

⁴ In June 2004, 44% of unemployed young people were receiving unemployment benefit, this rate was up to 61% for the total unemployed population (Unemployment agency statistical data: <http://www.assedic.fr/unistatis/>).

3. Changes in conditions of entry into the labour market

The French employment model is sometimes presented as a division of employment amongst generations: maintaining employment amongst adults is considered to be the priority and managing imbalances is carried over to the extreme age groups - young and old workers. This is a model where one single generation works at a time. Thus public intervention on the labour market is supposed to take responsibility for young people (extension of education, youth labour market policies) and the ageing workforce (reduction of the retirement age or reduction of the working week).

3.1. *Selectivity and vulnerability*

When arriving on the labour market, young labour force is particularly sensitive to changes in the labour demand. For over twenty years, the rate of youth unemployment has been twice as high as for adults - in March 2005 the rate amounted to 18.7% for the working population under 25 and 8.9% for the whole of the working population (Graph 3). However, youth unemployment has its specific features that distinguish it from adult unemployment. Youth unemployment is generally rotation unemployment: youth vulnerability to unemployment, in the statistical sense i.e. the probability for a person in employment becoming unemployed, but also youth employability i.e. the probability of leaving unemployment and becoming employed, are higher than for adults.

INSERT GRAPH 3 AROUND HERE

The rate of unemployment is completely layered by the level of education of young people. As early as the 1970s, young people leaving school without qualifications were the first to be affected by the rise in unemployment. Young graduates who saw their advantageous situation deteriorate between 1993 and 1997 were the first to benefit from the effects of the economic upturn and the improvement of the insertion conditions from 1998. Over the last decade, unemployment rate for unqualified young people has fluctuated but always remained 3 to 4 times higher than for young people with degree above the baccalauréat level.

Three years after they completed their studies, the employment rate is up to 80% for the 1998 school leavers cohort; it is higher for young people with higher education (93%), it remains quite low for young people with no qualification (59%).

A high level qualification means a lesser impact of economic fluctuations since the most skilled jobs are less sensitive to these and also, during job shortage periods, the selectivity of recruitment causes a chain deterioration in employment access levels, which causes major downgrading phenomena for skilled jobseekers and creates an eviction effect for the less skilled.

3.2. *Specific places in the employment system*

In comparison with the active population as a whole, young people employment has been traditionally concentrated in activities with high turn-over and in low skilled jobs. Typically, young people find their first job in retail activities, in a small or medium size enterprise, and as service employee or manual worker. The situation is different for those out of higher

education, three out of four are recruited in business services as executives or in an intermediate profession.

The main characteristic of young people employment is the high proportion of precarious jobs : three-quarter of young people educated with a baccalauréat level or a lower level have their first job in a fixed term or temporary contract. This is also the case for more than half of young people with university degrees whereas around 10% of the total employment is concerns by this type of contract. Three years after entering the labour market, the share of fixed-term contract has decreased on average to one third but it remains as high as 53% for unqualified young people.

Through these employment characteristics, the young labour force appears as the main target of selective effects on the labour market and polarised in the secondary segment. Typically, young people's wages at the beginning of their careers are closely linked to their level of basic education and rise according to the qualifications obtained, the gap between qualification levels widening with age and seniority. In addition, young women with the same standard of education systematically earn less than young men (Céreq, 2002).

Overall, it seems that an ILM logic still operates dominantly in France, at least in relation with selective mechanisms and occupational mobility patterns for young labour force. However, tensions in the transition system are supported by arguments related to the ILM destabilisation and that have been pushed forward convincingly (Gautié, 2004).

3.3. Diversity of school-to-work transition patterns

Diversity in school-to-work patterns is a prevalent characteristic of youth transitions in France. The monthly calendar of Céreq survey *Génération 98* enables to identify four main routes related to trajectories followed during the three years after leaving school:

- **immediate and sustainable access to employment** (54% of the generation): young people leaving higher education most frequently follow this type of route; most of them have been unemployed for less than three months. This lasting access to employment is not necessarily synonymous with a permanent contract and stability with the first employer, it may actually combine mobility between companies and different employment contracts;
- **deferred access** to a stabilised position in employment (24% of the generation) : trajectories are marked by several events that have deferred the stabilisation: national service in some cases, a temporary break from employment or a period of unemployment for others;
- **a path characterised by unemployment or inactivity** (17%) : three years after they leave the educational system, 70% of these young people are not working. Persistent unemployment or long periods of inactivity or a return to joblessness after a certain period in employment represent this type of route;
- **a path of returning to training** (4%) which actually leads to postpone the school-to-work transition.

Labour market outcomes depend on both the level of education, obtaining a certification and the training speciality or segment followed. Regardless of the level of education, more pupils with diplomas quickly find lasting job than their counterparts without diplomas; they are also less affected by extended unemployment; and the figures for those who quickly find a lasting

job are higher for those leaving industrial training segments than for those leaving the service segments.

Gender and social origin also have an influence on the route that young people follow after leaving basic education. Women most often follow insertion trajectories marked by unemployment or inactivity; they are also more prone to return to education. As regards social origin, being from an executive family provides the less-qualified young people with a relative degree of protection from the more difficult routes. As regards the highest levels of education, social origin is supposed to have a more subtle influence on the employment integration trajectory.

Finally, geographical factors also have an influence on the routes taken. Young people educated in the Paris region, Alsace or the Rhone-Alpes insert themselves more easily than the rest of the generation. A higher number of young people educated in northern and southern parts of France experience an insertion route marked by unemployment or inactivity.

Elements to Conclude and Perspectives

Changes have been quite important over the last two decades but there is still no clear trend in the evolution of the French school-to-work transition regime. Despite considerable progress in education, it is not clear that the educational system experienced a structural change: the rise in educational levels has stopped, the educational system still produces an important part of school leavers with no qualification, vocational training has a limited impact for access to skilled jobs, and overall there has been an enforced role of credentials as signals on the labour market, even if they are no more a total protection against unemployment.

The selective processes operating on the labour market are still strongly biased towards the traditional model of “a generation works at a time”. Both types of labour market policies appear to be successful to avoid unemployment for an important part of school leavers, they however seem to be very selective and to give shape to recurrent stays and protracted transitions. Moreover, the school-to-work transition period remains highly sensitive to economic evolution. The last cohort surveyed by the Céreq in 2004 after three years on the labour market was confronted with an economic downturn that pushed up unemployment rates close to the levels they were when this cohort entered the labour market in 2001 (Cereq, 2004). This downturn affected primarily young male workers on temporary jobs in industrial activities. The new feature is that, at this time of transition, there is no more gap between male and female unemployment rates (Céreq, 2004).

It appears that youth unemployment results in a set of mechanisms that relate more particularly to those of job shortages and make their forms of unemployment quite specific. This economic sensitivity is also due to the nature of the jobs now offered: temporary contracts, unskilled jobs and posts in sectors characterised by high levels of staff turnover. However, and in opposition with certain political or common discourses, young people, whose insertion trajectory is mainly characterised by unemployment, are overall in a small minority. Out of 740,000 young people who left school in 1998, over half had never been unemployed during the three first years of their working lives (Céreq, 2002). The dominant feature is one of diversity of school-to-work trajectories.

Finally, public labour market policies have a countercyclical effect but seem unable to cope with both the selectivity on the labour market and the precarity of employment status leading

to high turnover for young people. It seems that recent evolution in the access to employment for young people tends to enforce typical features of the school-to-work transition system in France and, at the same time, to reflect some structural transformations of the employment system, more particularly the experimentation of atypical forms of employment (Lefresne, 2003). New regulations of employment contract that are nowadays under debates (including the increase of probation period up to two years) are likely to contribute to this hypothesis.

Bibliography

Céreq (2002), *Quand l'école est finie... Premiers pas dans la vie active de la Génération 98*, Céreq, Marseille

Céreq (2004), 'Génération 2001, S'insérer lorsque la conjoncture se dégrade', *Bref n°214*, December, Céreq, Marseille.

Detzel, P. and Rubery, J. (2002) 'Employment systems and transitional labour markets: a comparison of youth labour markets in Germany, France and the UK' in G. Schmid and B. Gazier (eds) *The Dynamics of Full Employment: Social Integration Through Transitional Labour Markets*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Gautié J., 2004, « Les marchés internes, l'emploi, les salaires », *Revue Française d'Economie*, vol. XVIII, avril, pp. 33-62.

Giret J-F and Lopez A. (2005) 'Les politiques publiques au coeur des trajectoires des jeunes', *Travail et Emploi*, 101, 31-43.

Lefresne F. (2003), *Les jeunes et l'emploi*, Collection Repères, Paris : La Découverte.

Müller W. and Gangl M. (eds), (1994), *Transition from Education to Work in Europe – the Integration of Youth into EU Labour Market*", Oxford: oxford University Press.

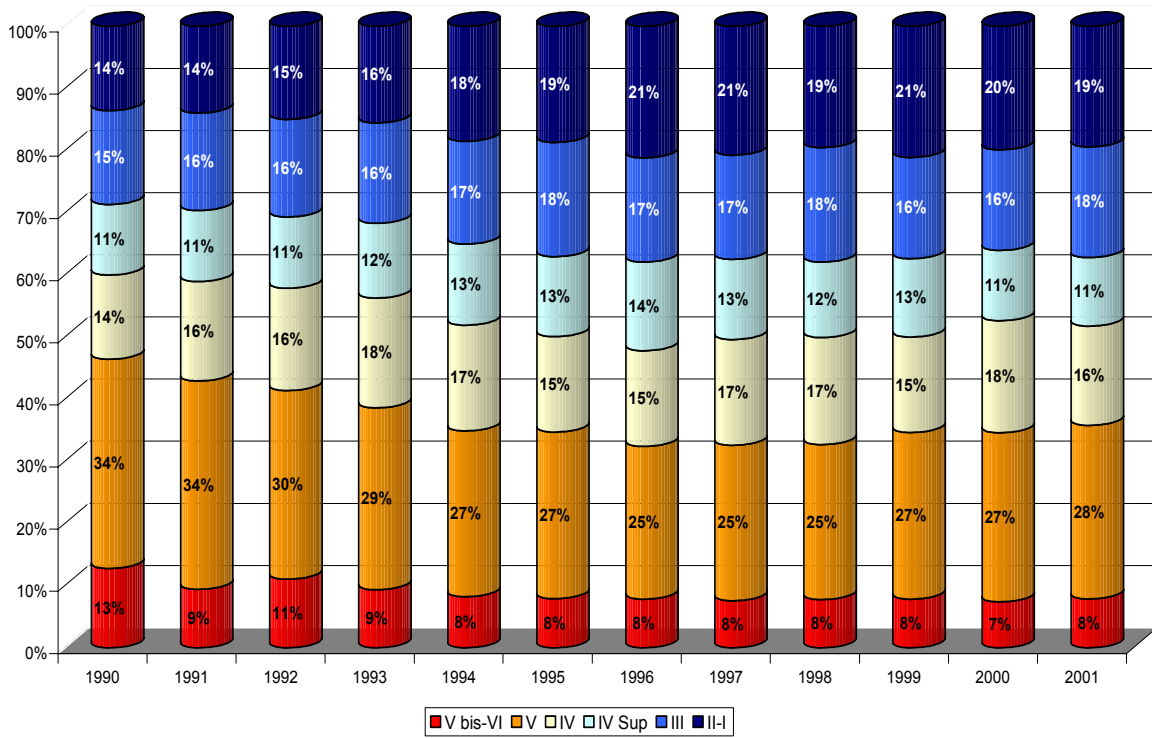
OECD (2000), *From initial education to working life. Making transitions work*. Paris, OECD.

Ryan P. (2001) 'The school-to-work transition : a cross-national perspective', *Journal of Economic Literature*, vol. XXXIX, n° 1, pp. 34-92.

Verdier E. (2001) 'La France a-t-elle changé de régime d'éducation et de formation?', *Formation Emploi*, 76, 11-34.

Walther A. (2005), 'Regimes of Youth Transitions', to be published in *YOUNG*, Vol. 14, No1.

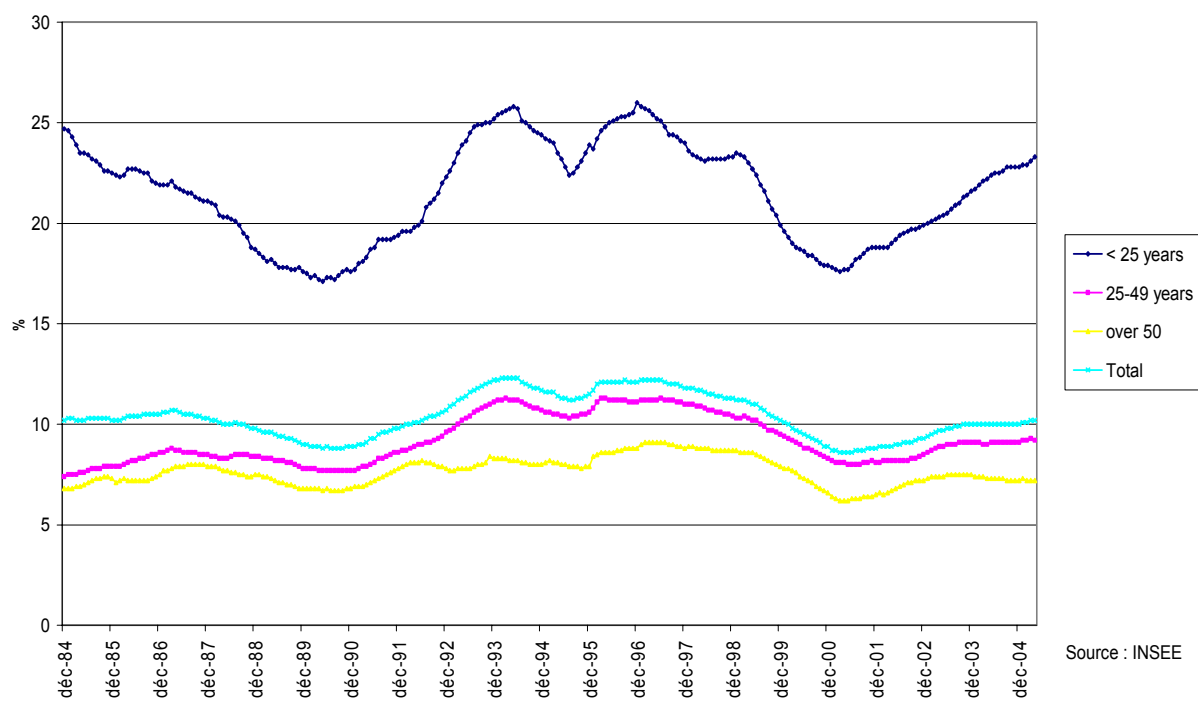
Graph 1 : Educational levels of school leavers, 1990-2001



Graph 2 : 15-24 years old employment in labour market programmes



Graph 3 : Unemployment Rate by Age Group, 1985-2005



Source : INSEE