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French universities and lifelong learning policies: an opportunity for adult learners?

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Continuing training has been one of the goals of French universities since 1968. However, most have only weakly committed to this activity, and adult participation in higher education (HE) is not well developed in France. Can lifelong learning (LLL) policies driven by international bodies since the early 2000s make a difference? By changing access to training and the content of training in order to establish continuity between initial education and continuing training, do LLL policies offer adults last-chance opportunities to attend open universities? How are the boundaries between initial education and continuing training in HE (higher education) systems evolving in France and other countries? By addressing these issues, our ambition is to understand whether adult participation in HE is currently developing.

The issue of continuing higher education changes

Continuing training and adult education have been parts of the French HE system for decades. Successive HE laws have reaffirmed the role of universities in this field since 1968. Continuing higher education (CHE) in France is governed by both the labour code and the educational code. On the one hand, CHE is a public legal education service; and, on the other, it is a competitive service on the market (Denantes, 2006). High economic and social expectations for continuing training and for CHE explain why laws have remained untouched over the years. Currently in France, nearly two-thirds of age groups enter the labour market with at least an A level diploma. This means that in future returning to school will focus increasingly on Bachelor's and Master's degrees.

Despite the attractiveness of additional funding (in a context of budgetary restrictions), universities have only weakly developed lucrative continuing training programmes. A government report emphasises their low contribution to the continuing education market (Igeanr, 2014). « *In 2013 HEI (universities, engineering schools and CNAM¹) realised a turnover of 427 million euros for continuing training, corresponding to 47,000 trainees and an average length of training of 116 hours (without internship)* ». Universities account for 64 per cent of HEI turnover, 76 per cent of HEI trainees and an average duration of 101 hours (without internship) (Grille, 2015). Their contribution to the market as a whole is very low: « *In 2012 they accounted for 1.55 per cent of trainees, 1.96 per cent of turnover and 4.21 per cent of hours of training in France* » (Igeanr, op. cit). Over the past ten years growth has remained low.

The core activity of universities is initial education for traditional students. Continuing training is a marginal activity. There are various barriers hindering its development: a lack of commercial, pedagogical and engineering skills, the availability of teachers, cultural constraints and insufficient political support. Several government reports make recommendations to improve LLL at university (Igeanr, op. cit., Germinet, 2015): rewarding lecturers for their involvement, clarifying business models,

¹ Three higher education institutions coexist in France: universities, engineering schools and CNAM (National Conservatory of Arts and Crafts).

adapting pedagogy to adult learners (with the implementation of competence-based approaches, part-time studies, e-learning, flexible and individual learning itineraries, and so on).

In most cases, adult education at university is carried out by contractual staff and engineers and not by permanent lecturers. Continuing training services generally take place separately from initial education programmes (Manifet, 2015). It is not often that universities break down the boundaries between initial and continuing education provisions and services. Yet, de-compartmentalisation could have positive effects on CHE development. In their ethnographic research conducted on the implementation of the validation of prior experience (VAE), Auras et Gehin (2011) noted that « *adult training and initial education for traditional students move closer together* ». In the university where the research was conducted, continuing training staff emphasised the continuity between services, which fostered the dissemination of VAE.

Since the early 2000s, international bodies have promoted LLL policies (Vinokur, 2003). Can LLL policies create new conditions for the development of CHE? In France, this means that « *each person may have the opportunity throughout his or her working life to acquire knowledge, qualifications and skills; to get recognition of professional experience, for personal or professional reasons. These possibilities are accompanied by the creation of new individual training rights and concrete measures* » (Le Douaron, p. 577, 2002). In order to improve adult participation in education, LLL policies transform access to training and the content of training. New links between education, work and training are being explored. Training-to-work itineraries are becoming less and less linear; and the educational and social profiles and expectations of trainees are becoming increasingly heterogeneous (Doray, 2000; Merle 2004).

A continuum between initial and continuing education seems possible. In France this means deep changes because the links between these two parts of the educational system are particularly weak. Following the 1971 law on continuing training « *the quasi-hegemony of employer-supported training mainly consisted of short professional training courses, which made it difficult to bring initial education and continuing training closer* » (Dubar, 2008). On the contrary, the consequence of this is that private training organisations are currently providing continuing training provisions separately from education programmes for traditional students (Bouillaguet, 2002). Moreover, degree programmes for traditional students have not been adapted to adult learners with prior professional experience, and for that reason “individual training leave” has not been widely used. In the context of closer links between education and enterprise, and of the professionalisation of university courses, « *a new training paradigm could occur* ». Some authors have observed the adaptation of degree programmes to adult learners: specific training degree programmes based upon adult needs were recently set up by CNAM (Dubar, op. cit. p. 178).

Are the boundaries between initial and continuing education blurring in HEI in France? Is adult participation in HE increasing? Do universities adapt degree programmes to adult needs? First, these issues are addressed from an international point of view. To this end, a literature review was conducted in order to compare various countries. Second, the French national situation was studied; we conducted an analysis of the legal framework and statistical categories. Third, we adopted a local point of view, delivering the results of a sociological survey of CHE stakeholders in the Rhône-Alpes universities (Borras & Bosse, 2015).

1. International comparison: boundaries between initial and continuing education are blurring

This section summarises the discussions and outcomes of two books (Slowey & Schuetze, 2012; Teichler & Hanft, 2009) and one article (Teichler, 1999), comparing LLL and CHE in several countries. Equivalent considerations of the role of universities in adult training are lacking in the French scientific literature. This section provides benchmarks for the study of the French case.

The issue of boundaries is a problem in many countries. There is no clear and shared definition of LLL in HE. « *One fundamental problem faced by comparative international education research is the range of different terms used to define the field of continuing education and adult learning* » (Bourgeois et al., 1999, p. 64). Terms such as « *lifelong learning (LL), adult education (AE), continuing education (CE), continuing higher education (CHE), university continuing education (UCE) and continuing professional development (CPD) are often used interchangeably by English speakers and even when the differences between them are defined, the boundaries between the terms are blurred* » (Hanft & Knust, 2009, p. 24). « *Just as lifelong learning is open to different interpretations, as the country case studies show, lifelong learners are also a very heterogeneous group, ranging from senior professionals, already well qualified and highly paid, who are attending post-experience postgraduate programmes to update and broaden their professional knowledge and skills, to adult learners with few, if any, previous qualifications, entering higher education programmes for a variety of reasons for the first time* » (Slowey, Schuetze, op. cit., p. 14).

Before comparing the countries, studies on CHE systems have to list and discuss criteria that enable them to distinguish between regular students and adult learners and between initial education and continuous training. Two criteria immediately come to mind: age and interrupted studies. However, they are not sufficient, because age is not meaningful. What is a student older than 25: an eternal student, a mature student, an LL student? The same problem arises with interrupted studies. In some countries, part-time and discontinuous studies are encouraged and are part of a model of transition to adulthood (Van De Velde, 2007). Consequently, other criteria must be taken into account, such as the goals and conditions of study return (Teichler, op. cit.), such « *as the nature of the entry/admission qualification; the access route, and the primary motivation for higher education study* » (Slowey & Schuteze, p. 15). Adult learners are generally defined by specific study conditions: part-time and scheduled accommodation (special classes at weekends and in the evenings), discontinuous studies, short-term courses, personalised and tailor-made courses, workshops, non-degree programmes, distance learning, online courses and non-traditional programmes for the professional development of graduates. All of these differ from the theoretical and implicit standard or norm characterising the conditions of study of regular students at university: full-time studies, continuous studies, academic degree programmes, conventional school pedagogy or skills' acquisition for initial entry into working life.

International studies attempt to classify adult learners in higher education. For instance, Teichler (op. cit.) divides adult learners into three categories according to desired goals and individual characteristics. First, continuing professional development (CPD) concerns adults with a Bachelor degree with two kinds of expectation: refreshers « *enrol in continuing education programmes to refresh their knowledge and skills* »; « *recyclers need an additional or different qualification for employment and professional purposes* ». Second, deferrers concern those « *who deferred entry into higher education, following completion of secondary education and gaining appropriate qualifications because they decided at that stage to enter employment or pursue activities such as voluntary work, travel, community engagement or family responsibilities* ». Third, second-chance learners are « *those without traditional formal entry*

qualifications (such as Abitur, A levels, Baccalaureate, Leaving Certificate, High School Diploma, for example) who enter higher education with a special entrance examination or assessment, and who are usually coming to higher education later in life on a second-chance basis » (Slowey, Schuetze, op. cit., p. 15). Adult education policies serve two different purposes: economic competitiveness and social justice (Doray, op. cit.; Dubar, 2008).

Just as deferred or second-chance studies necessarily correspond to regular degree programmes provided by traditional universities, CPD goes beyond this. CPD courses can be provided by private and lucrative organisations, as well as by higher education institutions. They can be tailor-made programmes, as well as regular degree programmes. In practice, two kinds of provision coexist: co-studies mixing young students and adult learners, traditional and non-traditional learners and compartmentalised studies dedicated exclusively to adults or non-traditional learners. The heterogeneity of profiles and the variety of provision show how identifying and classifying adults in HEI is a very complicated issue. According to the context, researchers, stakeholders and experts identify their own criteria. Nevertheless, two opposing conceptions deserve to be highlighted. One is narrow and the other broad, and they do not attach the same importance to the issue of blurring borders between initial education and continuing training.

Germany is an example of the narrow conception of continuing higher education. Until very recently, the continuing professional development of graduates was at the core of CHE. This led German HEIs to develop lucrative short-training courses and workshops separately from degree programmes for traditional students. *« Two things were completely or almost completely lacking; continuing education courses to prepare adults for higher education and ungraduated courses for non-traditional mature students are missing » (Teichler & Hanft, op. cit).* Continuing education programmes are largely funded by the higher education institution's central budget and are separate from programmes for traditional students. However, *« the traditional German education system was thus very open to students of different ages and with varying degrees of previous work experience, as long as they entered it via traditional routes. Approximately one-tenth of students in mainstream higher education in Germany begin their studies aged 25 or over, and the average student age is also approximately 25. Moreover, 64 per cent of students already have some work experience before going to university, and 66 per cent do paid work while they are studying ».* But these non-traditional students are not geared towards specific programmes. *« Adults can take advantage of the system as long as they don't expect adaptations to their needs» (Teichler & Hanft, op. cit, pp. 2–3).*

In many other countries *« CE is more than just the CPD of graduates; it includes second-chance courses, leisure, technological transfer, part-time education, distance learning, work-based learning... » (Osborne, 2004, cited by Hanft & Knust, p. 25).* This broad conception of continuing education purposes can be observed in the United Kingdom, where CHE includes all types of programme (short or long courses, courses to prepare adults for HE, Bachelor's and Master's degree programmes) and all types of profile (graduates and non-graduates). The approach is pragmatic because initial or continuous education fees are at the same level and are financed in the same way. The system of co-studies is well developed, even dominant: 50 per cent of 18–30 year olds are enrolled in higher education. As such, the main distinction concerns part-time and full-time studies. The limit between initial and continuous education is not an issue.

The same applies in Quebec. In this country, part-time studies were initially set up for workers so they could continue to work during their studies. What is noticeable is that they became increasingly

attractive for working students (Doray & Manifet, 2015). In the United Kingdom the Open University, a distance-learning university, was created with the support of the lobbying of adult education, and took the lead in setting up modular and flexible educational pathways. More and more, Open University is opening up to traditional young students. Furthermore, in traditional universities, academic faculties are becoming responsible for CHE programmes instead of specialised peripheral services. In an increasingly deregulated and decentralised system, where the level of public funding relies on accreditation, CHE is becoming an important source of additional financial resources. With training open to all ages, basic higher education and continuous education are no longer considered to be separate activities.

The broad conception of CHE purposes implies that it is no longer possible to distinguish between young and adult learners and to establish a classification of adult learners. HEI must face a new challenge. « *They must adapt programmes to more and more heterogeneous student expectations* » (Abrahamson, 1986, p. 71, cited by par Teichler, 1999, p. 179). However, this must inevitably lead to a weakening of continuing higher education policies, which could indicate the end of real adult higher education policies.

2. In France, financial considerations determine official boundaries

The emphasis on the issue of boundaries between initial and continuing education depends on the CHE policies adopted by each country. International research provides a framework for understanding the French CHE system. First, in France, French policies are governed by laws. The 1968 Faure's Act created « *autonomous universities which must open to adult learners* » (Denantes, op. cit.). The 1984 Act on higher education defines a public legal education service, including both initial and continuing training. A decree published in 1985 defines procedures relating to the implementation, within universities, of continuing education missions that are specified in the Title IX of the French Labour Code. The education code has remained unchanged since 1984: « *Continuing training applies to people engaged or not in work. It is organised to meet particular, as well as collective, needs. It includes both access of adults to academic regular studies and specific short professional or cultural courses and programmes* ». CHE has been split into two texts of different status: the educational code and the labour code. This led to tensions between two contrasting means of development of CHE within universities: as a public legal education service, or as a private lucrative service (Manifet, 2012; 2015). As a public legal education service, CHE is funded by the government. Regular academic studies, even when they enrol adult learners, remain part of the public education service. As a lucrative service, CHE is funded by enterprises or by public employment service. Universities have deployed a range of different training programmes to meet the needs of companies and which are separated from academic studies. These programmes are structured by the range of provisions deriving from the 1971 Law on continuing education.

The first provision is « TRAINING PLAN » (*PLAN*) on the initiative of the employer, used /to adapt or enhance skills, concerning mainly short-training modules but sometimes diploma programmes. The second provision is INDIVIDUAL TRAINING LEAVE (*CONGE*), on the initiative of the employee, funded by branches accredited collecting fund (*OPCA*), used for career development or professional retraining, aiming diploma programs. Both have been set up in 1971. They evolved, new provisions have been set up, but they are still in use at university. The third legal provision is « Alternance Contract » – (*Contrat de professionnalisation*). The first Alternance Contracts were set up in 1984 in order to reduce youth's unemployment. Since 2004, they have been extended to adults/ and they are called *Contrats de Professionnalisation*. They are funded by a compulsory contribution of companies (1 per cent of wages) managed by OPCA. This work-study contract is similar to apprenticeship, with a difference. Apprenticeship is in the field of initial education and entitled people must be under 26. Both work-study

contracts concern diploma programs and lead to a certification. Their purpose is professionalisation and qualification. These work study programs became very attractive for universities. They allow to spread vocational programs, that is a new constraint given by the Minister. The fourth provision is training for job-seekers developed mainly since the 1980's for reducing unemployment. They are funded by employment agencies or mainly by regional councils.

In accordance with the law, national statistics publications (Grille, op. cit.) provide an administrative view of CHE. First, France is following the UK's lead, with a broad conception of CHE. Indeed, CHE enrolls training for a variety of purposes: courses to prepare adults for HE, short courses leading to a certified qualification but not to a diploma, diploma programmes (specific university degrees and national diplomas), conferences for all ages and training support services (validation of prior experience, skills' assessment, and so on). In 2013 one-third of trainees enrolled in degree programmes or in programmes leading to a qualification listed on the French Register of Professional certifications (RNCP):¹ 19 per cent are preparing for university degrees, mainly in medical fields, one-quarter are enrolled on short courses and 19 per cent are attending cultural conferences that are open to all ages. In 2013 universities delivered 83,000 diplomas through continuing education: two-thirds of national degrees and one-third of university degrees. Of the 56,200 national degrees delivered, 37 per cent are Bachelor degrees, 30 per cent Master degrees, and 12 per cent diplomas granting access to university (an equivalent diploma to the French *Baccalauréat*, called *Diplôme d'Accès aux Etudes Universitaires = DAEU*). French universities provide two kinds of CHE: deferred and second-chance studies, as well as continuing professional development of graduates.

Second, France is also following Germany's lead, with a clear division between initial and continuing education. French universities are requested to conduct a specific survey on continuing education provisions, which allows specific national publications on CHE that are separate from publications on initial education or on apprenticeship in higher education. French universities are also requested to set up separate accounting and management systems. Continuing education is funded by private and public resources, while initial education is funded by the government. The publications issued by the competent authority set out the sources of funding. One half of funding comes from companies or from branches accredited for collecting funds (OPCA), 22 per cent comes from the trainees themselves, 20 per cent from public funds and 7 per cent from other funds. In recent years, it has been noticeable that public funding is decreasing and enterprise funding is increasing (Grille, op. cit.).

As a consequence, the classifications of adults in HE are based on administrative and financial criteria alone. There is no information about their sociological profiles or expectations: nothing is known about sex, age, prior level of training attained, discontinuity of studies, and the purposes and conditions of their return to studies (except for validation of prior experience). In fact, publications do not consider *adults* but rather *trainees* of lucrative continuing vocational training. Only one criterion delivers information about employment status before or during studies, which focuses on the source of funding (cf. Table). In 2013, 36 per cent of trainees were employees (27% were financed by PLAN, 2% by CONGE and 7% by Contrat de Professionalisation), 12 per cent were job-seekers, mainly supported by public funding, 28 per cent were individuals (except for conferences open to all ages, 15%) and 7 per cent were self-employed, traders and artisans. This means that for the Ministry of Higher Education the separation between initial and continuing education is mainly related to financial considerations.

Table

Distribution of participants and participant hours				
	Number of participants 2013	Participant hours (inc. practical training) 2013	Average length (inc. practical training)	2003-2013 number of participants
Training plan ("PLAN")	27%	16%	95	14%
Individual training leave ("CONGE")	2%	5%	366	-23%
Alternance contract ("CONTRAT PRO") (without apprenticeship)	7%	22%	530	343%
<i>less than 26 years old</i>	<i>88%</i>	<i>91%</i>	<i>547</i>	
<i>more than 26 years old</i>	<i>12%</i>	<i>9%</i>	<i>409</i>	
<i>Total</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>100%</i>		
Total employees	36%	43%	194	28%
Job seekers supported by public funding	8%	13%	255	-4%
Other job seekers	5%	9%	307	
Total job seekers	13%	21%	274	
Private individuals	33%	30%	145	
Interage seminars	11%	2%	29	
Total private individuals + interage seminars	44%	32%	117	-3%
Self employed, traders, artisans	7%	4%	86	40%
Total	100%	100%	162	15%
	498709	80 892 060		
Source :				
Table drawn up on the basis of statistical data on french education system ((http://www.education.gouv.fr/bcp))				

The data concern only one category of HE institutions: universities, including few engineering schools (called polytechnics and INP) and vocational institutes as IUT, IAE. This category represents 3 quarters of the total number of participants in CHE. Our survey is focus on this category.

3. Implementation: the discussion of official boundaries

The reality appears to be more complex than the official categories. The survey conducted in the Rhône-Alpe's universities shows that statistical and administrative delimitations are not sustainable when we observe genuine education and career paths (cf. Box 1). Initially, the survey was conducted to collect the representations of continuing higher education provisions and of lifelong learners of actors implementing continuing training within universities. Very quickly, the issue of boundaries between initial and continuous education arose. Most of the interviewees were highlighting two difficulties. First, it is not easy to identify many lifelong learners who are enrolled in initial academic courses. Second, as long as work-linked training continues to spread within universities, the gap between initial and continuous education will carry on narrowing and becoming less distinct.

Box 1: The survey on continuing higher education provision and learners in the Rhône-Alpes universities

This survey was conducted in 2014 and was supported by the Rhône-Alpes regional council as part of a broader research support programme. All universities took part in this survey: eight universities and one engineer school called INP(*). All academic disciplines and faculties are represented, as well as other parts of the French university system, IUT(**), IAE (***) or Polytech (****) (see Annex 1).

Rhône-Alpes represents 11 per cent of turnover and 12 per cent of participants in continuing HE in France. In Rhône-Alpes, universities represent 85 per cent of the total turnover, CNAM (****) 8 per cent, and engineer and business schools 6 per cent. At a national level CNAM's share is larger, with 29 per cent of total turnover, and the universities' share lower, with 65 per cent of turnover (source: <http://www.education.gouv.fr/bcp/>.) The survey focuses only on universities.

We began our investigation by looking at the universities' websites. We obtained relevant information on the organisation of continuing services within universities and identified people to be interviewed. The total number of staff employed in these services varied from 3 to 40 people, and the services were more or less decentralised. Very often, they were also dedicated to apprenticeship, to work-based training or to relationships with firms. In only one case, continuing education was merged with initial education in a service called « *long-life learning service* ». The most commonly used term for services is « *continuing training* » but sometimes also « *lifelong learning* » or « *continuing education* ». The interviews were conducted at both central level and within decentralised faculties (one law and the other sociology, anthropology and linguistics), or within vocational institutes: one IUT in « *sciences* » and one in « *human, social, communication and law sciences* », and two IAE. Vocational institutes such as IUT or IAE have a long history of managing their own affairs.

The survey consisted of 28 interviews with professionals, 10 directors (mostly academic teachers), 5 administrative directors, 4 vice presidents, 8 administrative employees (engineers, training consultants or coordinators) and one referent teacher at faculty level. We used a semi-directive thematic interview guide (see Annex 2). The interviewees gave their perceptions about the range of continuing education provision, about its implementation (co-studies mixing all ages or programmes dedicated to adults, specific conditions for lifelong learners or not, as part-time courses), about the profiles and the needs of lifelong learners, and about CE policy, notably in terms of fees and funding. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Individuals are quoted throughout the text (in italics).

- (*) INP = Polytechnic National Institute
- (**) IUT = university institutes of technologies IUT
- (***) IAE = institutes of business administration (IAE)
- (****) Polytech = polytechnic institute
- (*****) CNAM = National Conservatory of Arts and Crafts

3.1. The difficulty of identifying private individual learners

The actual share of private individual learners seems to be larger than the official share of 33 per cent (Table 1). Many of these learners are invisible because they are enrolled in the same academic initial programmes as traditional students. According to Béduvé and Espinasse (1995), who conducted a

survey with 10 universities in 1992, only 68 per cent of people who are enrolled in university programmes fit the definition of regular students: full-time studies, less than 27 years of age and continuous studies.

Twenty years later, identifying adults enrolled in university remains a problem for CE services. The people interviewed cite adult learners as « *drowning in initial education programmes* »; « *they are everywhere, that's the law* ». The issue arises with renewed intensity, with the increasing number of students returning to studies after a few years of active life following higher education drop-outs (Mora, 2014; Charles, 2016). If many adult learners are as yet invisible and enrolled in initial education "schemes", the interviewees also noted the importance today of identifying and properly classifying lifelong learners. The first reason for this is administrative: to provide accurate data on the number of adult learners to the national department of HE. However, there are also financial considerations for universities and learners. Indeed, invisible adult learners have to pay the same low fees as traditional students, while identified adult learners have to pay higher training fees. The classification of learners has a direct impact on universities' own resources: « *The good classification of learners helps the services to know if they have to pay training fees* » (administrative employee, training service, university).

Generally, universities plan a preferential tariff that applies to unfinanced training. This tariff is considerably lower than the tariff that applies to financed training, close to the full cost of training.

« *If training is not funded by private or public bodies, the tariff is divided by two, three or four. It is standardised. Nothing can be negotiated. No exemption shall be granted... The full cost for attending an Bachelor's academic degree is 4,000 euros. For unfinanced people, the university board divided the tariff by four, and then the tariff is 1,000 euros* » (director, training service, university).

In these universities, no exemptions are granted and individual tariffs are high enough. On the contrary, other universities offer more reductions in individual tariffs based on social criteria. Ad hoc commissions examine the files of candidates and take into account their personal situations. In some universities, exemption commissions are systematised and offer very low tariffs for ethical reasons, to make training available to all:

« *For people who could return to studies but who don't have financial support, we apply directly on a reduction of 90 per cent, and consequently trainees pay 10 per cent of the cost of training. For example, the price of a Master's degree decreases from 7,000 € to 700 €. Then, exemption commissions can propose to exempt these 10 per cent in some cases* » (vice president, CFVU,² university).

Furthermore, interviewees highlight that the identification of adult learners allows them to be entitled to specific provisions delivered by training services, which can examine personal situations and funding opportunities. They can offer tailored services suited to their needs, in order to improve the conditions of study and completion rates.

« *When we are talking about individual issues concerning the identification of adult learners... there is the fact that the person will continue to receive unemployment benefits. If the person is not well identified, is*

² « *Commission training and university life* ».

not well classified in our information system, he or she can lose unemployment benefits. There may be a financial issue, meaning that a person can enrol in university thinking he/she can't be qualified for funding, but he/she can have the wrong information » (administrative director, training service, university).

In order to identify these adult learners without financial support, universities use individual criteria, which are missing from the Ministry categories. Age (more than 28 years old) and duration of interruption to studies (at least two years) are both criteria used to distinguish lifelong learners from regular students. However, they are not always taken into account to the same extent by the universities and faculties.

« We solved this in a radical way. Beyond 28 years, learners are in the continuing education category. On the other hand, before 28 years, and with two years of interruption, both solutions are possible » (director, training service, university).

« A lifelong learner, from my point of view, is someone who entered the labour market at any given time (...) if someone stopped studies one year after passing his/her "baccalauréat", worked two years, then enrolled again at university... he/she has been working and accumulating social rights. So he/she will be classified in the continuing education category » (vice president of LLL, university).

Despite the existence of these criteria, many adults remain enrolled in initial education schemes. For interviewees, this situation results from the difficulties inherent in identifying adult learners in registrations. Solutions are being sought, such as the training of administrative staff in charge of registering students. However, some faculties are sometimes not interested in identifying adult learners. They mention a lack of resources, but they also show no sign of willingness to establish specific support services and provisions.

« That's right, that we have a real problem of identification, connected, I think... first to the mass of students who arrive (...) second to the lack of human resources. For many years, we had only one person half-time on this issue. Continuing training has been for such a long time a "poor relation" in our university » (referent teacher, continuing training, faculty).

Furthermore, adult enrolment in initial education schemes may also allow some programmes to be filled in faculties that are experiencing declining enrolment. In this way, the level of Ministry budget is maintained.

Given the differences in classification, even within one university, training services often demonstrate a tendency to standardise criteria, despite many barriers at the level of faculties.

« I won't hide that, at any rate, for a university ... in arts, literature, linguistics... consequently in areas generally not very attractive, even in initial programmes ... we are facing difficulties recruiting traditional students ... Therefore, the HE Ministry expect from universities that they fulfill the continuing education mission without the corresponding resources. We are facing a dilemma, often expressed in the discussions between training and schooling services within universities. They each pull to their own side. Training services underline the need for the identification of adults, and schooling services say that 140 students... that's important to them » (vice president, university).

Interviewees highlighted a major concern regarding the identification of adult learners in order to enrol them in continuing training schemes. However, when training is not financed by public or private funds, only individual criteria are available to distinguish adult learners from regular students. At the time of the 2014 survey, a Ministry of Higher Education circular (2013) recalled that neither age restriction (less than 28 years) nor duration of interruption of studies (more than two years) were legal criteria to determine a continuing training scheme. According to the circular, enrolment in a continuing training scheme implies the existence of a training agreement or training contract, with specific engineering and provisions. Only in this case can the person be enrolled in a continuing training scheme, and the university can apply a tariff that is higher than tuition fees for regular full-time students. Training agreements concern trainees financed by public or private bodies, while training contracts concern individuals, financing training by themselves, but asking for specific support and engineering. They can apply for a reduction in accordance with the range of tariffs approved by the university board. Adult learners who are not being funded are enrolled in a scheme called « *return to higher education without funding* » (circular, 2013, see p. 5), and universities apply the same tuition fees as for regular students. This original scheme makes it possible both to identify adult learners and to maintain financial allocation from the Ministry of Higher Education. In this case, the Ministry of Higher Education allows the same amount per adult learner as for regular students.

Dgesip's circular reminds us of the importance of the proper classification of learners: « *The challenge is a better allocation of resources and a better assessment of universities' involvement in lifelong learning* » (circular, p. 5). Implementation will necessitate additional resources in order to improve the identification of adult learners. Dgesip questions the tariffs implemented by universities, which could negatively affect their own resources. Indeed, most of the universities in which the survey was conducted do not provide specific support or engineering. It is that and only that which could justify higher fees. There are very few degree programmes restricted to experienced workers and to continuing training. Theoretically, all regular academic programmes can enrol adult learners; but these programmes are rarely adapted for non-traditional students.

3.2. Alternance contracts for young learners

While many adult learners are enrolled in academic programme schemes, paradoxically an increasing number of young students who never discontinued their post-secondary studies are today enrolled in continuing training schemes. This did not raise any critical issue for interviewees. The increasing number of young students enrolled in continuing training schemes clearly results from the development of work–study programmes at university, particularly of « *alternance contracts* ». ³ These « *alternance contracts* » belong to the range of legal provisions for continuing training, despite the fact that, in higher education they are almost entirely filled by students aged under 26. With apprenticeship, for its part in the scope of initial education, « *alternance contracts* » are very often undertaken by continuing training services.

In five out of nine universities where the survey was conducted, and in two IUTs (university institutes of technology), continuing training services cover continuing education, as well as work–study programmes, including both alternance and apprenticeship. The extension of work–study programmes leads to decompartmentalising initial and continuous education, even within the organisational charts. The word

³ *Contrat d'alternance*: a contract that combines theoretical training at school and on-the-job training in a company.

alternance is often used in a similar way to alternance contracts or apprenticeship. Many commonalities are underlined, in terms of pedagogy or training schedules.

However, these two work–study programmes have significant differences in other areas such as funding and age conditions. Beyond the age of 26, job-seekers are no longer eligible for apprenticeship, but they are eligible for « *alternance contracts* ».

« For apprenticeship, training positions are open to young people who are not working, for sure, it has switched over to the side of initial education. But in practice [...] similar training programmes enrol all university learners. I could say that training provision has been shaped by years and years of opening of apprenticeship training programmes » (vice president, university); *« Apprenticeship is a modality of initial education, we must not forget it, but with strong similarities, that's why it's also in my sphere of activity, close to the implementation of alternance contracts. Because, from a pedagogical point of view, there is no difference, from financial or legal points of view, the differences are deep »* (director, training service, university).

« *Alternance contracts* » became a significant area of development for continuing training at university, using the resources of continuing training services, sometimes to the detriment of other learners:

« [Out of 370 continuing training learners], approximately, we have 300 alternance contracts, 60 apprenticeship contracts and for the rest: individual training leave, job-seekers... » (continuing training project manager, IUT).

Interviewees underline that universities must develop work–study programmes, which will reach all university levels and, of course, continuing training services, which seek to involve university departments and degree programme supervisors.

« We had a main core at IUT, at IAE, and in some faculties, dissemination has taken place ... And now, we are working with the Faculty of Law, where they are convinced things are progressing, whereas before they weren't » (vice president of LLL, university).

« One goal of our university is to convert 100 per cent of professional degrees into alternance and 50 per cent of Master's degrees. During the year we will convert 100 per cent of professional degrees, which means contacting all the lecturers and helping them to bring the case. Mainly, it means giving them tools, booklets, training schedules, helping them at the pedagogical level, improving coordination, seeing how it could be possible to modularise degree programmes, converting initial education programmes into work–study programmes, without having to modify everything » (director, training service, university).

Statistical data shows a dramatic increase in « *alternance contracts* »: they represented 7 per cent of the total number of participants in 2013 and an increase of 387 per cent since 2003, whereas the data shows an average increase of 15 per cent (see Table 1).

However, in most cases, « *alternance contract* » positions are not filled by adults: in nine out of ten cases, trainees are under 26 years of age (see Table 1), meaning that they are less costly to employers. These positions are therefore intended primarily for young people in post-secondary education with a similar purpose to initial education.

« Alternance, it means, more or less, further education for young people in a different way. If we are looking for the opportunities that alternance contracts offer to adults, beyond 26, generally they are limited, because they cost much more to the employer. When a company has to choose between a young person who costs nothing and an older, more expensive person, I'm making a caricature of the situation, generally it moves towards the young person who costs less; I can't blame them... » (director, training service, university).

According to the interviewees, universities choose alternance to meet the challenge of professionalisation. As a matter of fact, the pace of the professionalisation process sped up following the LRU law (law reforming the status of universities and reinforcing their autonomy). LRU (2007) provided the new duty of the occupational integration of young people to universities, in addition to their traditional duties, research and education (Quenson et al., 2012; Rose, 2014). Furthermore, every degree programme needs to clarify its professional goals in order to be accredited by the Ministry department:

« That's true, our concern, and it is directly connected to professionalisation and to the occupational integration of graduates, is to set up work–study programmes » (administrative employee, training service, IUT).

Furthermore, work–study programmes represent, for universities, significant additional financial resources in a tight budgetary situation.

« It's true that the main sources of funding for IUT are all work–study programmes. Overall, they account for two-thirds of revenue » (administrative employee, continuing training service, IUT); « Because most university departments are currently subsisting with that money. The State budgetary allowance became a minor detail, compared to continuing training, alternance and apprenticeship money ... without continuing training and work–study programmes, there would be no more training in our university. Perhaps we should not say so, but it is the case » (director, training service, university).

If « *alternance contracts* » lead to an increase in people enrolled in continuing training programmes, they focus on young people, who, as part of their university studies, are preparing for diplomas in sandwich courses. « *Alternance contracts* » are mainly used to prepare young people for initial entry into the labour market. Another way of developing continuing training is overshadowed, such as part-time studies or curricula adapted to specific adult needs. Thus, the means implemented for continuing training, already regarded as insufficient (Igeanr, op. cit.), are increasingly focused on a single provision, namely, the alternance contract.

Conclusion: the issue of the conditions of studies of non-traditional students

Our analysis of the demarcation between initial and continuing education within higher education provides information on the dynamics of university continuing training provision.

In the international literature on higher continuing education, the criteria for defining adults enrolled in higher education degrees were debated throughout the 1990s. However, soon the debate shifted towards the conditions of studies of non-traditional students. Universities, confronted by the growing heterogeneity of enrolled students (working students, job-seekers, non-graduates returning to studies, professional development of graduates) started to develop more flexible training itineraries: part-time studies, discontinuous training paths, short courses, non-degree programmes, distance learning programmes, on-the-job training, and skills' acquisition over the course of a career. There still remains

considerable scope for progress to improve adult participation in higher education. This is all the more true if we consider the range of pressures undermining the higher education system: budgetary decrease, over-valorisation of research activity in the international rankings and greater emphasis on success rates (Slowey & Schuetze, op. cit., p.282).

In many countries the number of adults enrolled in higher education is much higher than in France (Igeanr, op. cit., p. 51). The share of students aged over 30 enrolled in higher education in France is 8.8 per cent and the median in European countries is 16 per cent. France has one of the lowest percentages in Europe; Nordic countries and the UK have the highest percentages (between 29% and 40%). However, even in these countries, where university programmes are very accessible to adult learners, « *there is no consistent political approach regarding the role higher education should play in the framework of lifelong learning [...] and the expectation that continuing professional education will be a lucrative source of income for the institutions of higher education might make those institutions even more reactive* » (Teichler, 1999, p .183).

The international literature suggests that French universities are lagging far behind in adult education. It also highlights differences in discussions around issues that matter to continuing training stakeholders. In France the main issue concerns the boundaries between initial and continuing education. This is consistent with the institutional framework and with separate financial mechanisms.

However, the official separation is becoming less consistent, with the growing diversity of training paths (from studies to employment, and to studies from employment) and the blurring of categories. This point was illustrated, first, by the difficulties inherent in identifying and classifying adults returning to studies with their own funding, and, second, by the increasing proximity between initial education and continuing training within work–study programmes.

Furthermore, we noted a stark contrast between the importance of the issue of identification of adult learners and the lack of debate on the conditions of studies of non-regular students. In France the main changes in the conditions of studies in higher education programmes are currently driven by the requirements of work–study programmes. Workers, job-seekers and adult learners are entitled to participate in these programmes and can take advantage of them. However, the schedules and content of training are mainly adapted to the needs of young people entering the labour market for the first time and only partially meet the needs of adult learners.

In conclusion, the adaptation of continuing higher education provisions to the current needs of adult learners would necessitate updating an institutional framework and rethinking the 30-year-old categories. This would require further in-depth analysis of the sociological profiles of non-traditional students (*une sociologie des publics non traditionnels*). The issue is to make adult learners visible to institutions (Charles, op. cit).

Would the stakeholders in continuing training higher education encourage such changes? This needs to be explored. Actually, the blurring of categories offers valued local flexibility such as choosing between an increase in financial resources or enrolment in academic programmes.

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Annexe 1

**The universities where the survey was conducted:
academic fields, departments and number of students (2015),
Continuing training turnover, number of participants and number of graduates (2014)**

University	Academic fields	Including vocational departments	Enrolled students 2015 - %	Continuing training		
				Turnover 2014 - %	Number of participants 2014 - %	Number of graduates 2014 - %
Lyon 1**	Health Sciences Physical and sports (STAPS)	IUT (sciences + administration/business), Polytech, IFSA	21 %	31 %	33 %	40 %
Lyon 2	Law Economy Business Administration Arts Literature Languages Humanities	IUT (sciences + administration/business)	17 %	7 %	12 %	7 %
Lyon 3	Idem Lyon 2	IUT administration business	16 %	15 %	13 %	8 %
Grenoble2	Idem Lyon 2	IUT administration/ business IAE	11 %	12 %	16 %	13 %
Saint Etienne	Idem Lyon 1 + Lyon 2	IUT secondaire IUT tertiaire Télécom	11 %	10 %	11 %	10 %
Grenoble1	Idem Lyon 1	IUT secondaire Polytech	10 %	10 %	7 %	10 %
Savoie	Sciences, Law, Literature, Humanities	IUT (sciences + administration/business) Polytech	8 %	9 %	3 %	10 %
Grenoble3 ***	Arts Literature Languages Humanities		3 %	2 %	2 %	2 %
INPG		Engineer school	3 %	3 %	1 %	< 1 %
Total Rhône-Alpes*			100 % (170 697)	100 % (49,25 M €)	100 % (54 597)	100 % (11 927)

Source : <http://www.education.gouv.fr/bcp/>

Bases de données statistiques du système éducatif français

Note de lecture.

**En 2015, les 8 universités de Rhône-Alpes et l'INPG comptent 170 697 inscrits. En 2014, le chiffre d'affaires en FC est de 49,25 M€ pour 54 597 stagiaires et 11 927 diplômés en FC.*

***En 2015, Lyon 1 représente 21 % des effectifs des universités de Rhône-Alpes. En 2014, elle représente 31 % du CA, 33 % des stagiaires et 40 % des diplômés en FC. Les domaines de Lyon 1 sont les sciences. Elle compte deux IUT, une école d'ingénieur universitaire (Polytech) et un institut de science financière et assurance (ISFA).*

**** En 2015, Grenoble 3 représente 3 % des effectifs des universités de Rhône-Alpes. En 2014, elle représente 2 % du CA, stagiaires et des diplômés en FC. Les domaines de Grenoble 3 sont ALL et SHS. Elle n'a pas de composante professionnalisée de type IUT.*