

NEW SKILLS AT WORK

JPMORGAN CHASE & Co.

EUROPEAN CASE STUDY

**School-to-work
transitions in France:
connecting stakeholders
via virtual campuses**



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ABOUT THIS PAPER

This paper was produced as part of a pan-European programme of work managed by IPPR (the Institute for Public Policy Research). This case study is part of a series of analyses that are being conducted in 2015/16 on aspects of European skills issues and labour markets. These case studies will be compiled in a format that allows for cross-country comparisons to be made and lessons to be drawn for both policy and practice.

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1. Introduction

This case study analyses a new initiative in the school to work transition space in France, the *Campus des métiers et des qualifications (CMQ)*. The CMQ approach was selected because it focuses on the critical issue of matching young people's competences with employment opportunities. The initiative emerged from an extensive public debate around how to arrest the decline in OECD PISA rankings of France's school age pupils which, in turn, led to a law¹ (*Loi sur la refondation de l'école*) aimed at making vocational education and training more appealing.

The CMQ initiative creates 'virtual campuses' which bring together all stakeholders in a given geographical area around a particular industrial sector that offers considerable scope for employment. In a nutshell, the CMQ is about connecting the world of education and the world of work in order to improve the match between competences produced and competences sought after.

Although it is a very new effort, it was chosen for its capacity to shed light on some of the key issues stakeholders face with when trying to facilitate school-to-work transitions in France.

2. The context

High rates of youth unemployment

France has had elevated rates of unemployment for almost four decades. In particular, the youth unemployment rate has been high and steadily increasing, despite a series of policy responses aimed at addressing this problem. In 2013, unemployment for those young people that have been in the labour market for one to four years was around 20%, compared to an overall French unemployment rate of 9.8%. For those without qualifications the rate was closer to 50%.²

¹ *Loi sur la refondation de l'école* (www.education.gouv.fr/pid29462/la-refondation-de-l-ecole-de-la-republique.html).

² 28.3% for those at the first qualification level (EQF 3) and 9.2% for those with a tertiary education qualification (EQF 7 and 8).

France already has in place some of the most advanced systems around this issue (e.g. a National Qualifications Framework for promoting mobility and transparency, and an extended data collection system for understanding juvenile issues, both in place since the early 70s, as well as a systemic approach to validating and recognising informal learning outcomes (in place since 1992, revised in 2002)). Successive governments have implemented policies in the area: the main focus has been on subsidising jobs (through lump sum payments or tax reductions for employers that hire young people).³ There have also been efforts around formal learning.

Although there is consistent micro and macro evidence that such youth schemes have had a positive effect on the school-to-work transition – especially when the learning component, vocational preparation or acquisition of labour experience has proven effective (Aeberhardt *et al.*, 2011; Werquin, 1997) – youth unemployment remains persistently high. Several schools of thoughts have developed around this issue.

- One view is that the French labour market is too rigid (with strong segmentation), and that labour is too expensive, especially when it comes to young people without experience. However, the plethora of youth schemes, since 1977, and the large number of young people in marginal jobs over the same period does not support this thesis. A key concern is that flexibility comes at a cost, such as losing competences (Colebrook *et al.* 2015).
- Another view is that young people do not have the proper qualifications,⁴ or competences, or both,⁵ or that these are not at the appropriate level. This theory is backed up by evidence: 25% of each annual youth cohort entering the labour market has no qualification and the unemployment rate is almost perfectly correlated with level of qualification.

What is beyond doubt is that initial unemployment is detrimental to long-term employability. Young unemployed people usually have a low or very low level of qualification, meaning that they are barely employable in the first place. If their initial

³ From the first youth scheme (*Pacte pour l'emploi des jeunes*, 1977) to the most recent one (*Emploi d'avenir*, 2012).

⁴ Formal document describing the competences of the owner (*certification* in French).

⁵ Ability to apply learning outcomes in a given context, otherwise known as know knowledge, skills and attributes in the context of the European Qualifications Framework typically.

period of unemployment is too long or too repetitive it will tend to erode the few competences they do have, entrenching the problem over the long term and often leading to a downwards spiral of unemployment, poverty, and social exclusion. Social cohesion is clearly threatened and social unrest or extreme political tendencies have been witnessed in France over the recent years.

At a macro level, unemployment is an issue because of the burden it places on the benefit system and because the unemployed do not contribute to economic growth.

It is, though, important to dig a bit deeper into what the high youth unemployment rate in France reveals. The participation of young people (15-24) in the labour force in France is low (about 37%⁶; vs. 43.5% in the EU) because young people are staying increasingly long in the initial education and training system. To be clear, an unemployment rate of 25% does not mean that one in four young people are unemployed. Given that the labour force participation rate in this group is about 37%, what this means is that a little fewer than one in ten young people are unemployed. But it remains true that for those that try to enter the labour market, it is difficult to find a regular job.

Poor collaboration and communication

Youth unemployment is clearly correlated with qualification level. It is also connected to the field of study/training and whether young people follow an academic or vocational track.

There is strong evidence that certain vocational qualifications – especially those in heavy industry sectors with high growth potential – more often lead to a regular job. However, young people often lack relevant information and guidance about career opportunities and especially opportunities in Technical Vocational Education and Training. That prevents them from making educational choices that are informed by existing labour market opportunities. Without information they are unable to choose the most appropriate learning pathways and it is impossible to design effective incentives to orient them in promising directions.

As surprising as it may seem in 2015, the world of work and the world of education still do not really talk to each other in France. This is true even when it comes to designing new or updated vocational and technological qualifications.

⁶ <https://data.oecd.org/emp/labour-force-participation-rate.htm>

Although there are domains in which communication exists (e.g. State/Region Agreements,⁷ the apprenticeship system, industry training programmes, Sector Skills Councils,⁸ and local committees in the context of the CLEE⁹), evidence suggests that it is largely insufficient. The fieldwork conducted for this case study found that many employers do not even know what education and training provision relevant to their industry sector is available in their region or sector. Furthermore, very few teachers in France have direct workplace experience in France.

One thing that exacerbates the communication problem is an apparent mismatch in timeframes between the education and training system and the labour market. The education and training system works in a rather rigid way with the “production” of graduates only once per year, always in June. The labour market, on the other hand, may call for workers at any point during the year, whenever order books are full and needs are there. Companies are not effective at anticipating demand before such a point is reached.

Overall it appears that while there are many **national** opportunities for consultation and cooperation there are far fewer at the **local** level. Hence the choice of the Trades and Qualifications Campuses (CMQ in French) as a case study since the aim of this is to promote better communication among all stakeholders of the school-to-work transition through formal partnerships at a local level.

3. The Trades and Qualifications Campuses (CMQ) Initiative

The CMQ initiative was established to improve the vocational preparation of young people in economically promising sectors (e.g. Aeronautics, Biotechnologies and Mechatronics¹⁰), and to help employers overcome difficulties in recruiting competent workers. It is a joint initiative of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Employment and the Directorate for Research and Industry. Each

⁷ *Contrats de Plan État-Région*

⁸ *Commissions paritaires consultatives*

⁹ Commission locale école-entreprises (www.ac-aix-marseille.fr/cid80255/les-acteurs-du-partenariat-ecole-entreprise.html)

¹⁰ “Smart materials, sensors and connected objects”

Campus is designed and operates around one specific educational and industrial sector, usually a sector with high employment potential.

A CMQ is not generally a physical place (with some exceptions: a building was constructed in one of the campuses) but rather a 'virtual' campus organised around a pole of excellence, with a consistent set of activities, from training to research, innovation and production. A typical CMQ does not therefore have staff (this arises as an issue in the analysis), though it does have proper governance and a strategic committee.

In practice, a CMQ is a **formal partnership** among many stakeholders interested in education, training, competences, qualifications, employment, business and economic development, mostly on a local basis. It aims to provide a framework for activities – again such as training or communication – that are more relevant when decided upon and organised in a collective manner. Any activity deemed necessary to improve the functioning of education, training and/or employment may be part of the campus approach.

Based upon the interviews we conducted, the most common activities are:

- Opening new learning pathways or programmes;
- Opening of new modules in existing programmes;
- Revision of existing *curricula*; and/or
- Developing a communications strategy.

CMQs must involve as stakeholders and full participants:

- The political Authority of the Region (*Conseil régional*);
- The education and training Authority of the Region (*Rectorat*);
- Upper secondary institutions (high schools, or vocational training centres);
- Tertiary education institutions (university, or tertiary non university institutions; including research department); and
- Enterprises.

A Campus must have a leader, this role is usually taken by an upper secondary vocational institution.

There is a formal application process following which the government – through the Ministry of Education – grants approval and campus status to those consortia that

meet its criteria.¹¹ Two calls have so far been issued by the government (in 2013 and 2014) resulting in 31 campuses being approved (14 in 2013 and 17 in 2015; see Appendix 2 for a map and the corresponding themes).

The campus approach provides an envelope, rather than specific content. It aims to make training both more relevant and better coordinated with local business. A key objective is to promote collaboration in order that young people are offered and achieve appropriate training and skills development, and also to make employers aware of the skills that are available in their regions. In this way the education/training organisations are brought into partnership with employers and contribute more to regional economic development.

4. Case study CMQs

This case study is based on interviews with several stakeholders in three Campuses as shown in Box 1.

Box 1: Case study campuses

CMQ “Mechatronics, smart materials, sensors and connected objects” (*Mécatronique, matériaux intelligents, capteurs et objets connectés*) (Mechatronics for short).

- Region: Centre
- Education Authority: Orléans-Tour
- Person interviewed: the Campus coordinator

CMQ “Aeronautics” (*Aéronautique*)

- Region: Provence-Alps-French-Riviera (PACA)
- Education Authority: Aix-en-Provence and Marseilles
- Person interviewed: the Campus coordinator, a staff member of a company operating in the field of aeronautics, a consultant involved in the Henri Fabre project, a staff with a training centre

CMQ “Biotechnologies and Bio-industries” (*Biotechnologies et bio-industries*) (Biotechnologies for short)

- Region: Normandy (city of Évreux)
- Education Authority: Rouen
- Person interviewed: the Campus coordinator

¹¹ www.education.gouv.fr/pid25535/bulletin_officiel.html?cid_bo=86485

In addition, several national (e.g. at DGESCO, Ministry of Education) and regional (e.g. the Political Authority and the education and training Authority in the PACA Region) stakeholders were also consulted at the outset to identify promising experiences and to establish a list of possible contacts. It is interesting to note that at the local level it has proven difficult to obtain additional contacts from local stakeholders. Typically, it has barely been possible to obtain the names of the companies involved in any Campus, with the notable exception of Aeronautics. This appears to be a result both of the limited involvement of companies and the low level of networking that has taken place thus far.

Findings

The CMQ initiative is at an early stage of implementation: few campuses are actually operational and an even smaller number have made significant steps toward concrete actions that will benefit young people and industries.

What is clear, though, is that some stakeholders were already working together before the campus initiative was introduced. For example: secondary vocational schools/centres with enterprises; tertiary education institutions with enterprises; local political authorities with vocational training and education schools/centres; and local political authorities with education and training authorities. The difference that the CMQ has made is that **all** these organisations are now working together at once and interactions are now recorded.

How are CMQs faring?

The 31 existing Campuses are at different stages of development according to whether the underlying consortium had already been functioning for a while (sometimes for decades) or was recently built from scratch in order to achieve the Campus label.

For example, the Campus “Aeronautics”, in Provence, was established on the foundations of an existing industrial project – the *Henri Fabre Project* – that aimed to strengthen the attractiveness to young people of industrial training programmes specific to the region. The same is true of the Campus “Biotechnologies”, since a Public Interest Group (GIP in French) existed before the creation of the Campus itself. The Campus “Mechatronics”, on the other hand, was built from scratch; no formal relationships existed between higher education institutions and local companies before its actual implementation.

Not surprisingly, those campuses built on existing foundations have been more efficient in setting activities in motion because they can rely on existing diagnoses as to the needs of the sector and the relevance of existing training programmes (in the case of Aeronautics), and about the needs for cooperation within the limit of the Campus territory (in the case of Mechatronics). The brand new campuses, on the other side, are still experiencing teething troubles around issues such as selecting activities, organising themselves and/or communicating on a regular basis. In some instances, even the campus launch itself was challenging. As one participant remarked: “The first call for projects was published in 2013 and it was artistic vagueness: we did not know what we were putting, or supposed to put, into it”.

The first initiatives taken in the context of a CMQ often relate to training. This may be new training or the facilitation of projects that were already under consideration. For example in the case of the Campus in Normandy (Évreux), the CMQ initiative accelerated the introduction of a vocational bachelors programme/qualification and facilitated the opening of “European classes” at the upper secondary level in Sciences and Laboratory Technologies.¹²

The added value of the CMQ is that it may play a role as one-stop centre for enterprises trying to implement training programmes and act as a hub for sharing learning materials.

As a communication tool, the CMQ is also meant to provide a guidance instrument for young people and their families. Thanks to the newly awarded CMQ label, young people are assisted in navigating the jungle of career choice: forums, fairs, interviews, enterprise visits, meetings, discovering trade jobs in school, etc. All the CMQs in the case study have opted to put in place a reinforced information and guidance approach that offers assistance on several levels: career guidance for young people; information of their parents; information targeted at teachers in upper secondary education; information targeted at lecturers and professors in tertiary education; and information targeted at employers.

It is a surprise, then, that several interviews have shown that local enterprises – whatever their size – still do not know much about the qualifications awarded in their region (the names and content of the different qualifications, and even less the learning outcomes and competences they generate).

¹² The project even benefited from resources from the education and training regional Authority (*Rectorat*).

What are the main benefits?

In the interviews we conducted, the most often-cited benefits of the CMQ approach were:

- the development of new learning pathways or programmes;
- the insertion of new modules in existing programmes;
- revision of existing *curricula* to reflect labour market needs; and/or
- better communications strategies.

Other benefits noted include:

- better identification of companies' training needs;
- better distribution of training provision across the territory;
- rationalisation of training provision (discontinuing obsolete programmes, opening new, relevant ones);
- more internships for young people;
- more piloting of new training programmes, or new training modules;
- increasing awareness amongst young people of existing job opportunities before enrolling in a training programme;
- increasing young people's awareness of job vacancies after graduation; and
- more company involvement in the design of training programmes.

What are the key challenges?

However, there are also numerous challenges emerging.

During the fieldwork, by far the most frequently heard comment at each campus was that there is a glaring **lack of governance**. Since the government does not provide any financial support, there is no permanent staff and therefore nobody to facilitate the process of collaboration. In some campuses this actually means that, "nothing happens" because there is no facilitator/coordinator whose job it is to promote the network.

So, for example, the Campus Mechatronics has not made any progress since February 2015 "because the structures are heavy, and the organisation not agile enough". At the moment, an upper secondary school Principal does the job of trying

to manage the collaboration but he devotes only 20% of his time to the Campus. It is just not enough and it does not work. As was remarked: “The regional education and training Authority (*Rectorat*) should invest so that at least one coordinator is appointed on a permanent basis”.

In each Campus, a vocational upper secondary school is co-opted to coordinate stakeholders’ activities and to provide follow-up for all actions. However, the political Authority of the Region (*Conseil régional*) and the education and training Authority of the Region (*Rectorat*) retain the responsibility for framing and steering the strategy. This seems to be detrimental to really making a fresh start in re-thinking the vocational education and training *curricula*. Indeed we uncovered reports during our interviews of the existence of very damaging power games between the political and the education and training authorities, something that is not at all conducive to establishing a network and to sharing a vision for the future of young people, and their preparation for the labour market.

Typically, enterprises do not have a leading role – and sometimes no role at all – in governing the Campus (though what can make a huge difference is when consortia are backed by wealthy industries that support their functioning, e.g. in the case of the aeronautics sector).

Another concern is that the CMQ really provides **nothing new**. It may end up being just another in a long string of existing initiatives (e.g. Trade Jobs High Schools, Technological Platforms, School-Enterprises Local Commissions¹³). In some cases, the newly created CMQ was actually based on an existing School-Enterprise Local Council (e.g. the Campus in Rouen) or on a Technological Platform¹⁴ (the Campus in Évreux), that turned out to be missing its key component – i.e. training – so that the partners moved on to gather in a CMQ.

The fact that the CMQ initiative is still heavily piloted from and by the Ministry of Education creates the risk exists that **enterprises lose interest** in the approach. To somewhat substantiate this point about the weight of the Ministry of Education, an interviewee of this ministry reports:

“The Ministry of Education did launch the CMQ initiative. Today, the matter is being dealt with by the DGESCO (a division of the Ministry of Education) but the political

¹³ Respectively *Lycée des métiers*, *Plateformes technologiques* and *Commissions locales école-entreprises*.

¹⁴ In the case of the Technological Platform in Évreux, it was established in 2008 with a Public Interest Group, a training centre, a research laboratory, and a technology transfer centre to reach private enterprises.

and education regional authorities are leading the individual campuses. The national level is monitoring all the campuses and it does provide the impetus through the call for proposals (the first three calls have framed the over time evolution of the CMQ initiative). In September 2014, the Minister of Education decided to establish a Strategic Committee, to decide on its composition and to steer it. This sort of experts' committee represents the diversity of the stakeholders but it stays in the hand of the Ministry. Its function will be to provide an impetus, to regulate and, in the future, to evaluate.”

The same person also stated that, “some campuses still are an empty shell despite the strong political central will in the early days”...

Campus success appears to be directly linked to the quality of the social dialogue within the consortium (IGEN, 2015). This is certainly the legacy of a state-controlled model for vocational education and training in France. Deitmer (2015), for example, states that a state-controlled model for vocational education and training hinders real and sustained linking to the labour market.

Analysis

It is still early days for CMQs, but thus far the evidence is mixed.

It is certainly wrong to assume that the mere act of establishing partnerships – even formal partnerships with the imprimatur of the mighty Ministry of Education – is a significant breakthrough in 2015 France. In addition, since French history is littered with attempts at bringing the labour market to the education system and vice versa, a more valid question is whether there is significant *value added* in the CMQ concept rather than whether this provides the answer to France's problems of youth unemployment.¹⁵

The key innovation is that literally all actors are involved. Indeed, this is a precondition for achieving the Ministry label. Every previous attempt has failed to bring all possible actors and stakeholders together to work toward the same endeavour. The efforts have failed in different ways: some have been unable to bring together tertiary education institutions and vocational education centres, others have failed to ensure that industry stakeholders commit to the occupational development

¹⁵ In fact, the CMQ initiative might be understood as a follow up to similar – but less comprehensive – previous efforts, such as the High School of Trade Jobs (*Lycée des métiers*) or the Technological Platforms (*Plateformes technologiques*).

of young people and/or to the improvement of education and training provision. It is therefore the scope of the CMQ initiative that sets it apart.

What the first findings seem to indicate, however, is that it is difficult to make these various stakeholders work together, even when they agree that it would be beneficial to all. Evidence from the fieldwork suggests – in Évreux for instance – that working in teams and/or networking is not easy as most stakeholders think in terms of competition – sometimes not explicitly so – rather than in terms of cooperation. The supposed benefits of networking have yet to totally convince those stakeholders who are hesitant about sharing potentially valuable pieces of information.

The CMQ is an instrument that goes beyond mere actions. It aims to improve cooperation among actors – this is the common thread that links all the interviews we conducted: the CMQ is a communication tool; it is a facilitator and an instrument for the actors to work together. However, all interviewees also agreed that, “working together is difficult”. Several reasons have been put forward: power games, fear of losing control over local achievements, fear of losing leadership.

Clearly, education and training is a competitive world. This was already known in the tertiary education sector but may come as more of a surprise in the technical vocational education and training world.

Nevertheless, many stakeholders also recognise that: “we are stronger in a team rather than alone”. This is probably the most important sense upon which the CMQ initiative can build, though it is not obvious that all stakeholders in all campuses appreciate this important point.

The campuses in this case study all operate in heavy industry sectors which are often neither well-known, nor attractive, to young people, despite the real employment opportunities they offer. To address the challenge of the attractiveness of the corresponding education and training programmes (especially in the case of initial education and training), stakeholders should cooperate more, work together and share their know-how.

When it comes to adapting training programmes to company needs several interviewees raised the issue of timing: the Ministry of Education is slow and heavy and enterprises may not have the liberty to wait for graduates to leave the initial education and training system. Nevertheless, the CMQ approach has provided opportunities for improving the autonomy of stakeholders to develop training modules. The “Biotechnologies” and “Aeronautics” campuses have already started developing training modules within existing training programmes, thanks to the

exchange of information between enterprises and upper secondary institutions (e.g. with technical and vocational high schools). In so doing, other benefits appear such as teachers meeting employers from the heavy industry sector. Some Campuses have organised internships for teachers, or at least visits of industrial premises. It seems even simple actions have led to clear improvements in communication.

5. Conclusion

Up to this point the CMQ initiative has achieved relatively little. Some indeed suggest that it is too small an initiative to address the massive issue of youth unemployment in France.

But it is still early days. After this necessarily limited fieldwork, it seems that the CMQ initiative does hold out potential. In particular it builds on key strengths:

- it operates at a local level;
- it targets industry sectors with high employment potential; and
- it brings together, or tries to bring together, absolutely all relevant stakeholders.

Although limited in scope, several similar steps in this same direction will probably create momentum, leading to a win-win situation for the world of work and the world of education. The ministries in charge of the CMQ initiative certainly seem to want to accredit more and more campuses though, given some of the weaknesses identified during the fieldwork (in terms of resources and of facilitation), it is an open question whether it makes more sense to accredit more campuses or to reinforce and develop the existing ones. The risk is that a rapidly growing number of campuses might mean more and more empty shells.

As stated repeatedly above, the campuses now need resources, in particular to support a staff in charge of the facilitation and coordination on a full time basis. In a context in which there are numerous actors and stakeholders, and an even greater number of urgent actions to be implemented, existing campuses still need resources. They also need non-financial support.

There remains a danger that the CMQ approach becomes very fragmented as it grows. An intensive policy (with just a few campuses, heavily supported) would be an interesting option to consider and discuss rather than an extensive one (many

campuses poorly supported, or not supported at all). In addition, in the long run the multiplication effect would probably be greater if existing campuses were clearly successful. Success breeds support. So one option, going forward would be for the State to commit to deepening its support for the 31 existing campuses, rather than creating new ones, helping them with their communication strategies, monitoring their progress and evaluating their actions for further improvements. In the final instance, evaluation does contribute to the legitimacy of public policy.

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Appendix 1: Abbreviations and Acronyms

BEP:	<i>Brevet d'études professionnelles</i> (Used to be the first vocational qualification, together with the CAP, but somewhat more theoretical, i.e. in upper secondary education (EQF Level 3); it was discontinued as an autonomous qualification and is now the first step of the vocational Baccalaureate)
CAP:	<i>Certificat d'aptitude professionnelle</i> (First vocational qualification (EQF Level 3), more hands on than the BEP)
CPC:	<i>Commission professionnelle consultative</i>
CQP:	<i>Certificat de qualification professionnelle</i>
CLEE:	<i>Commission locale école-entreprises</i> (School-Enterprises Local Commission)
CNAM:	<i>Conservatoire national des arts et métiers</i> (A French Education and Research Tertiary Adult Institution, founded in 1794)
DGESCO:	<i>Direction générale de l'enseignement scolaire</i>
EQF:	European Qualifications Framework
EU:	European Union
IPPR:	Institute for Public Policy Research
LEST:	<i>Laboratoire d'économie et de sociologie du travail</i>
OECD:	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PACA:	<i>Provence-Alpes-Côte-d'Azur</i>
PISA:	<i>Programme de suivi des acquis des élèves</i>
VAE:	<i>Validation des acquis de l'expérience</i> (Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning Outcomes or Recognition of Prior Learning Outcomes)

Appendix 2. Location of Existing Campuses, and Sector

