

Studying or working abroad: does it ease the education-to-work transition for young people in France?

A period of living and studying or working abroad is generally regarded as an advantage for young people when they enter the labour market. And young people who go abroad during their final course of study do indeed enter the labour market on more favourable terms. However, this apparent advantage is in fact linked to the establishments they attended and the social milieus in which they grew up.

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Does studying or working abroad give young people an advantage when they enter the labour market? Convinced in principle that this is the case, the European Council recommends that more should be encouraged to spend time abroad. As part of the 'Education and Training 2020' strategy, it declared in 2009 that '*mobility for learners, teachers and teacher trainers should be gradually expanded*' since it was an '*essential element of lifelong learning and an important means of enhancing people's employability and adaptability*' (Conclusions of the Council of 12 May 2009, Strategic objective 1: Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality).

Céreq's *Génération 2010* survey can be used to investigate time spent abroad during a course of study. More specifically, it can be used to assess the impact of studying or working abroad on the education-to-work transition of young people who were living in France at the time of survey, which was conducted in the spring of 2013. It shows, firstly, how very diverse such stays are, in terms both of the form they take and the length of time spent abroad. Most of the longer periods abroad are spent by the most highly qualified young people from advantaged social backgrounds. Secondly, it puts into context their impact on early career trajectories. Although the young people concerned do indeed enter the labour market on more favourable terms, this is first and foremost because the qualifications they have obtained are those that give them the greatest advantage in the graduate job market.

'Learning mobility' tends to be the preserve of student elites

Some 210,000 young people (30% of the 2010 cohort) spent time abroad in the course of their studies. Of these, 72,000, or 10 % of the cohort, did so during their final course of study. The purpose of these periods spent abroad varied: most took the form of work placements (44%) or school of university exchanges (40%), while a smaller share (25%) involved paid work. Some were able to combine several of these purposes.

Those spending time abroad were primarily students: 15% of those leaving higher education had studied or worked abroad during their final course of study (the figure for secondary school leavers was 5%). Within higher education, the elite business and engineering schools stand out because they are much more likely than universities to include time spent abroad in their programmes. Thus while 17% of those graduating from 2-year master's programmes spent time abroad, no fewer than 65% of business and engineering school graduates did so.

As well as these differences by level of degree, there are also considerable disparities depending on social background: 17% of the children of managerial and executive staff spent time abroad during their final course of study, while only 6% of the children of manual workers did so.

#KEY WORDS
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The length of time spent abroad during the final course of study varied considerably, with half of the stays lasting less than three months and 25% more than six months. European countries were the main destinations; of these, the UK was the most popular. Indeed the English-speaking countries were well represented generally. Those graduating from 2 or 3-year courses in healthcare and social work, who went in greater numbers to Africa, were the exception. Although the time spent abroad was compulsory for 42% of the young people concerned, the purpose of their study was very seldom to obtain a qualification of some kind. No fewer than 82% of the young people stated that they had returned to France without having obtained any qualification.

The young people funded their time abroad in various ways, with some tapping more than one source. Families contributed in 63% of cases, central government grants and other financial assistance helped to fund 36% of the stays, while 9% received funding from the Erasmus or Leonardo programmes and 16% from local government bodies (mainly at regional level). Twenty-three per cent received a placement allowance, while a quarter had to work in order to fund their time abroad.

A wide range of experiences

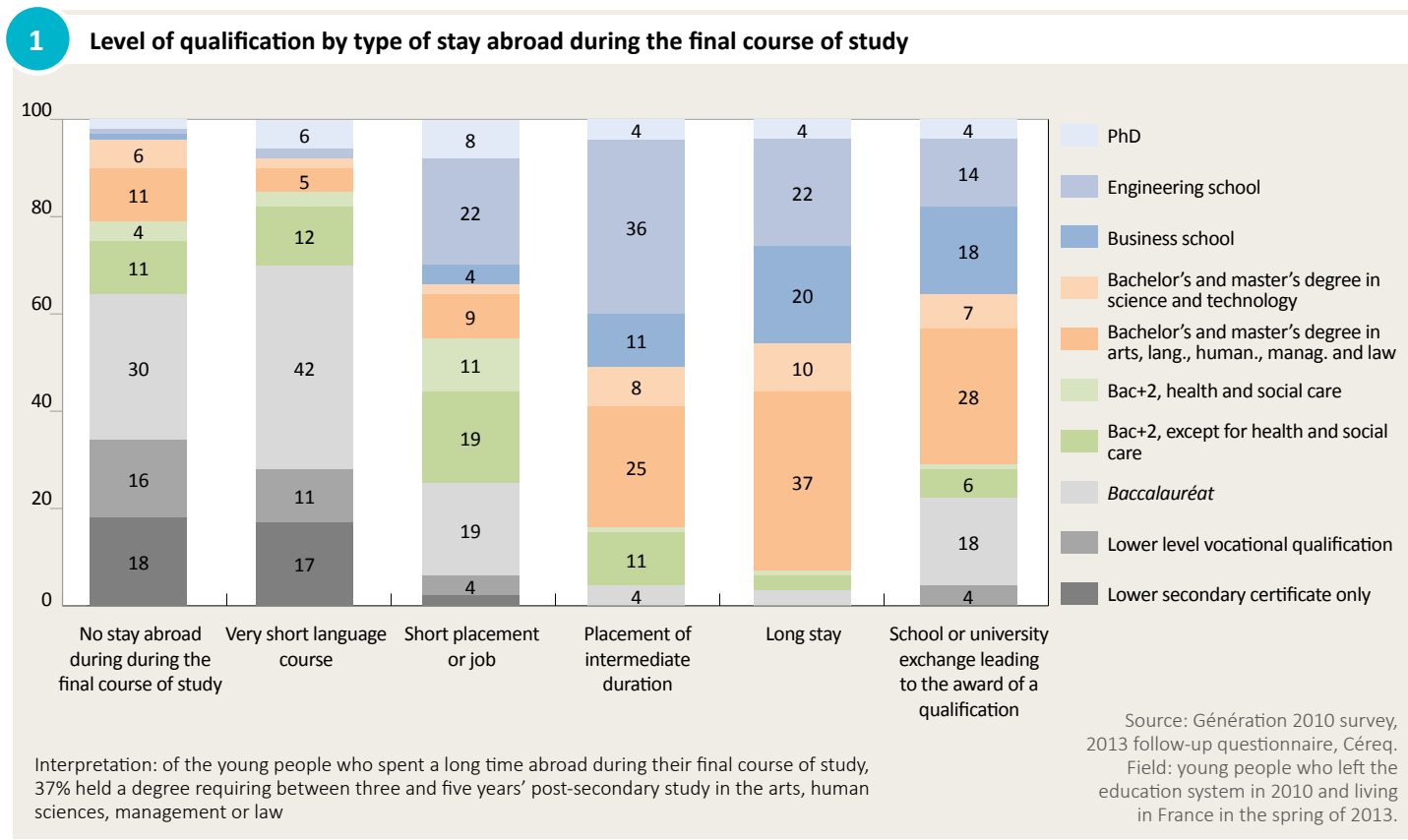
A typology constructed on the basis of a multiple correspondence analysis, followed by a classification, enabled us to identify five 'typical profiles',

that is five classes or groups of stays abroad. This type of statistical analysis makes it possible to group the various stays around a set of shared characteristics. In this case, the length of time spent abroad stands out as the most differentiating characteristic.

Twenty-four per cent of the young people who spent time abroad could be included in the very short language course group. Their stays abroad lasted less than one month and usually took place as part of a school or university exchange that was a compulsory part of their course.

Twenty per cent of the young people belong to the short placement or job group. Their stays abroad lasted one or two months and involved a placement (86%) and/or a job (51%). A further fifth of the young people belong to the placements of intermediate duration group. Their stays lasted between three and five months and often led to the forging of professional contacts (in 53 % of cases).

Seventeen per cent of the young people were in the long stay group (6 months or more spent abroad). Many of them were in receipt of a grant or other public financial assistance. Most of them went on school or university exchanges during which they were able to forge professional contacts. The last group accounts for 18% of the young people, most of whom went abroad for variable lengths of time on school or university exchanges leading to the award of a qualification of



some kind. Of this group, 58% declared that they had obtained a qualification in the course of their time abroad.

The characteristics of the stays appear to be closely linked to those of the courses of study followed. Higher education graduates, who are in a minority in the very short language course group, become very much the majority when the length of time spent abroad increases. The longer stays (three months and more) were largely the preserve of university students. Among them, those on courses requiring between three and five years' post-secondary study spent the longest periods of time abroad, while business and engineering school graduates accounted for the majority of those in the placements of intermediate duration group. The very short language courses were largely the preserve of those leaving education after secondary school (cf. graphic).

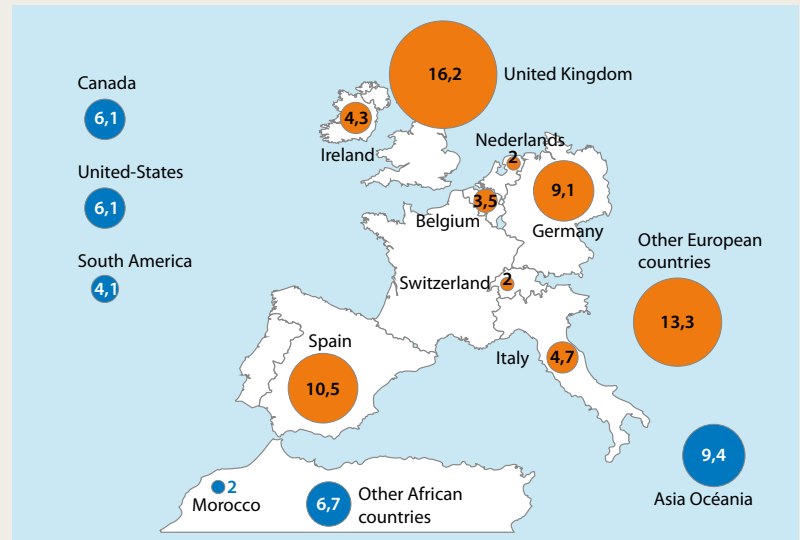
Direct effects on the education-to-work transition in France very limited

It is generally assumed that time spent abroad has a positive effect on the education-to-work transition. It is widely regarded as a way in which young people can develop specific abilities, notably linguistic ones, that may be assets in the labour market. The 'mobility capital' thus acquired may enable them to widen the scope of their job search, both in France and abroad.

Furthermore, comparison of the labour market integration indicators for young people who spent time abroad during their final course of study and those who have never had this type of experience systematically reveals an advantage in favour of the first group (cf. the Unadjusted Difference column in the table on page 4). Thus it might initially be concluded that time spent abroad has a positive effect. However, the fact of having spent time abroad depends on the initial characteristics of the young people concerned and the differences observed cannot in any case be interpreted as a direct effect of their stays abroad.

In order to estimate this effect, it is essential to construct an econometric model capable of taking into account the effects of the young people's characteristics (highest qualification, gender, social background). For young graduates with degrees requiring two or more years' post-secondary study, who constitute the largest group to have spent time abroad, the effect of each type of stay was estimated, the reference group being those young people who had never spent time abroad. This type of analysis shows that the young people's characteristics have a greater influence on the education-to-work transition than any time spent abroad.

2 The destination countries



Source: Génération 2010 survey, 2013 follow-up questionnaire, Céreq.

Field: young people leaving the education system in 2010 having spent supervised time abroad during their final course of study and living in France in the spring of 2013.

3 The 'experience abroad' module of the 2013 survey of the 2010 cohort

In 2013, as part of its programme of Génération surveys, Céreq questioned a sample of 33,500 young people who were representative of the 708,000 young people who left the education system in France for the first time in 2010 (metropolitan France and the overseas départements). Only those young people living in France at the time of the questioning (April-July 2013) were included in the survey. All the young people were invited to respond to a module devoted to experience abroad during their time in education. It describes in detail their experiences abroad during their final course of study, whether they went as part of their studies, to take up a placement or to work. Unless otherwise indicated, the results presented in this edition of Bref relate solely to these types of stays. The final course of study is the time spent studying for the final qualification obtained before exiting the education system: the two years of a full master's degree or the three years spent studying for the the vocational baccalauréat, for example.

The module of questions on time spent abroad was compiled in collaboration with the Agence Erasmus + France and the results shown here are taken in part from the analysis of this module carried out by Céreq for Erasmus +.

Further reading

Portrait des jeunes en mobilité internationale - Analyses de l'enquête Génération 2010, *L'observatoire Erasmus+*, n°1, 2016.

« Les effets des expériences à l'étranger en cours d'études sur l'insertion : quelques résultats issus de l'enquête Génération 2010 », J. Calmand, P. Rouaud, E. Sulzer, communication aux 7èmes Rencontres Jeunes et Sociétés, Poitiers, Octobre 2014.

« International experiences and career success of european graduates », F. Kratz, J. Calmand, Transitions in youth conference, Nijmegen, 2012.

Les mobilités étudiantes, V. Erlich, Paris, La documentation française, 2012.

All other things being equal, none of the types of stays abroad has a significant effect on the fact of being in employment or holding a permanent job in the spring of 2013. Only a small number of significant effects, albeit weak ones, can be observed on the share of managerial positions held and on the level of pay at that date (cf. Net Effect column in the table below). Thus placements of intermediate duration and long stays increased the probability of holding a managerial position in 2013 by five percentage points. Long stays or school or university exchanges leading to the acquisition of qualifications had a positive net effect on the young people's pay levels.

In order to explain the weak effect of time spent abroad on the education-to-work transition in France, it can be hypothesised that 'learning mobility' at the end of initial education restricts contacts and potential employment opportunities with French employers. Since it is commonly the case that students on placements are hired by the host company on completion of their placement, those young people who have done their final placements abroad may, from this point of view, be disadvantaged.

In the final analysis, therefore, and all things being equal, the various types of stay abroad seem to

have a modest or even zero effect on the education-to-work transition in France.

Young ex-pats: the blind spot of our analysis

The only obvious effect of time spent abroad on early career trajectories concerns professional experience abroad at the beginning of the working life. Long stays and school or university exchanges leading to qualifications significantly increase the chances of having professional experience abroad during the first three years of the working life.

This observation reveals the limits of an analysis that does not include the young people who were still living abroad in the spring of 2013. These ex-pats, who are probably overrepresented among the young people who spent fairly long periods of time abroad in the course of their studies, are not included in the survey field, although they are likely to have entered the labour market on more favourable terms. Thus including them in the analysis could change the overall assessment. It would be all the more relevant since one of the aims of programmes like Erasmus is precisely to increase mobility within Europe...

4 Estimation of the impact of the time spent abroad on the education-to-work transition in France for HE graduates by type of stay (in percentage points, in euros for pay)

	Employment rate		Share of unfixed-term jobs		Share of managerial jobs		Average net wage (euros)		Worked abroad between 2010 and 2013	
	Unadjusted difference	Net effect	Unadjusted difference	Net effect	Unadjusted difference	Net effect	Unadjusted difference	Net effect	Unadjusted difference	Net effect
Very short language course	2	NS	1	NS	6	NS	160	NS	2	3**
Short placement or job	6	NS	10	NS	20	NS	230	NS	6	NS
Placement of intermediate duration	5	NS	9	NS	34	5**	390	NS	6	NS
Long stay	4	NS	7	NS	33	5*	480	110*	12	13***
School or university exchange leading to the award of a qualification	1	NS	3	NS	29	NS	410	130**	9	9***

Significance threshold: ***=1p1000, **=1%, *=5%, NS=non-significant.

The unadjusted difference represents the percentage difference between those young people who spent time abroad and the others. The net or adjusted effect is obtained by an econometric analysis that makes it possible to neutralise the young people's initial characteristics in order to estimate the specific effect of the stay abroad, all other things being equal. The following initial characteristics were taken into account: highest qualification, parents' qualifications and socio-occupational category, gender and last year of education/training spent in apprenticeship.

Interpretation: young people holding qualifications requiring 2 or more years' post-secondary study, having spent a long time abroad and living in France in the spring of 2013 are more likely to have worked abroad than those who have not spent time abroad: the net difference is 13 percentage points, which is attributable to the time abroad effect.

Source: Génération 2010 survey, 2013 follow-up questionnaire, Céreq.
Champ: Young graduates from bac+2 or more living in France in spring 2013.