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The Vocational Integration of Students-Apprentices in the Context of a Pandemic Crisis: Feedback from the University CFA in Corsica

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has generated major economic impacts in the vast majority of countries, including falling GDP and global trade, massive job losses, deficits and increased public debt. If quasi-generalized interventionist economic policies have made it possible to cushion the paralysis of the productive devices, the short-term global outlook remains very uncertain. In this gloomy context, what will be the situation on the labour market, and in particular the vocational integration of students?

Corsica presents the example of a small island territory in search of a regional development scheme based on the economy of knowledge and competence. In this major structural perspective, the University Apprenticeship Training Centre (CFA UNIV) in the Corsican region has been striving, for a decade, to contribute to the enhancement of students-apprentices vocational integration from the University of Corsica.

Within the scope of its activities, are the monitoring and evaluation of the students-apprentices' professional integration from the University of Corsica. Since 2011, the carrying out the annual surveys on students-apprentices' future from the University of Corsica has demonstrated the capacity of the sandwich course training in Higher Education simultaneously to boost the employability of skilled human capital and the growth of local business structuring.

This contribution will aim to synthesize ten years of CFA UNIV experience and will endeavour to analyse the localized consequences of a global pandemic crisis on the nature of the vocational integration student-apprentices from the University of Corsica in a small territory island.

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1. Introduction

In France, Law No. 2007-1199 on *the freedoms and responsibilities of universities* of 10 August 2007 is intended to enable all universities to affirm their scientific excellence and to offer students the conditions for a social and personal success based on work and deserves.

The achievement of this objective requires a profound reform of the universities' organization and functioning. In this respect, guidance and vocational integration are expressly included among the primary tasks of the public service in higher education. Following the same logic, the governance model for vocational training in universities and private training institutes has undergone a major overhaul as a result of legislative developments in lifelong learning^[1,2].

In Corsica, the University Apprenticeship Training Centre (CFA UNIV) has been working since 2009 to promote the professional integration of students-apprentices from the University of Corsica *by promoting and developing a system of theoretical training, practices and technology while meeting the human resource needs expressed by employers on the island*^[3,4].

The history of its activity and its specific characteristics have been the subject of previous publications^[5,6]. The issue of the quality of the professional integration students-apprentices from the University of Corsica, particularly in terms of entrepreneurship awareness, revealed the strategic challenge of mastering managerial fundamentals at the heart of the development dynamic and structuring of the Corsican territory^[7], reinforcing what other authors have shown in a more theoretical framework^[8] or global^[9].

The island's geographical area consists mainly of an entrepreneurial fabric composed 95% of very small enterprises, craftsmen and traders in search of a territorial scheme centered on the economy of competence^[10].

Corsica is also an example of a territory characterized by an ageing labour force, involving a necessary medium-term adjustment of regional training strategies in response to this reality. As a major lever of territorial development and social regulation, the island training system must adapt its offer with a targeted view to the adequacy of the employment-training relationship. It must respond to the problem of an accentuated ageing of a population exerting greater pressure on the demography of entrepreneurial structures that generates an indispensable process of business takeover^[11]. The purpose of the various lifelong learning schemes (apprenticeship and continuing vocational training) is to meet the human resource needs expressed by those involved in the local socio-economic fabric^[12].

Since January 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the vast majority of national econ-

omies resulting in an unprecedented drop in global GDP^[13]. Interventionist economic policies combined with massive stimulus packages have been put in place to combat massive job losses and cushion the paralysis of productive systems.

In this gloomy context, what will be the situation on the labour market, and specially the vocational integration of students-apprentices?

The CFA UNIV's long-established and timeless vocation is to contribute to the enhancement of the professional integration students-apprentices at the University of Corsica, by developing and adapting fundamental training strategies for the emergence and stimulation of the availability of qualified human resources and the entrepreneurial logic based on innovative activities with high potential growth^[8]. Nevertheless, the global pandemic crisis is likely to have negative localized effects on the nature vocational integration of students-apprentices in a small island economy. It is to this focal problem that our contribution will strive to answer.

2. Individual Monitoring of the Students-apprentices Vocational Integration at the University of Corsica as a Key Concern of the CFA UNIV

The accession to the autonomy of the University of Corsica, supported by the legal directives on the *freedoms and responsibilities of universities*, was also accompanied by an extension of its scope of missions. The traditional functions of training and the transmission of knowledge and skills are now added to the support and reception of new students, to the follow-up of their personal and professional project until their success, that is to say, their graduation and their professional integration.

In this context and adapting to the specific island mix of publics (classical students, students-apprentices, active) the prerogatives of the CFA UNIV also concern the production and dissemination of statistics including, in particular, indicators of students-apprentices' school-to-work transition.

2.1 The Ministerial Directives to Carry out Follow-up Surveys on the Vocational Integration of Outgoing Students-Apprentices from the University of Corsica¹

In Corsica, the establishment of a training map for

¹ The CFA UNIV conducts the annual apprenticeship-to-work transitions ('IPA') survey specific to University of Corsica sandwich-placement students (tracking transition to employment of all (graduate or non-graduate) sandwich-course leavers as of March the following year).

higher education adapted to local particularities is the shared prerogative of the University and the Collectivity of Corsica². Since 2011, the CFA UNIV has carried out ten annual surveys on the future of graduate students-apprentices from University of Corsica³. The specific methodology for the implementation of the follow-up surveys on the vocational integration of students-apprentices (mail out questionnaires, email and phone reminders) enabled an average response rate of 89,9%⁴ (i.e. 1485 respondents out of 1652 people surveyed), which is a statistically representative panel of the total population.

The study points presented are structured around twelve major themes:

Situation of work-study students⁵ outgoing

Employment type (indefinite contract, fixed-term contract)

Occupational classification of existing jobs

Matching training to employment (is the employment consistent with the training being taken?)

Type of structures taking on work-study students outgoing

Size of structures taking on work-study students outgoing

Location of job contracts held

Wages of work-study students outgoing

Kinds of jobs held by work-study students outgoing

Link to the initial outgoing work-study students structure (are the work-study students outgoing employed under the same roof?)

Situation of outgoing work-study students pursuing studies at another institution

Reasons pushing outgoing work-study students to continue in education at another institution

The map of vocational training offered by the University of Corsica illustrates six main fields of activity (law, management, commerce, industries, environment, computer science- communication) representative of the typical character of the island economy in which training needs for human resources are expressed structurally.

In the end, 40 vocational training courses (6 *university technology diplomas* (DUT), 16 *professional bachelors degrees* (LP) and 18 *Masters degrees* were targeted, representing 946 students, including 317 students-apprentices⁶.

2.2 Results and Data from the Apprenticeship-to-work Transitions ('IPA') Surveys Translated with a View to Building a Sustainable Territorial Development Scheme

In accordance with the priority strategic guidelines set by the annual vocational training program adopted by the Corsican Assembly for the period 2019-2023, the Collectivity of Corsica, with the expertise of all island training centers, co-builds a coordinated program of vocational training to increase skills to create sustainable added value in the territory.

The results and data presented below emerge from the ten IPA (apprenticeship -> employment) surveys conducted by the CFA UNIV⁷. About the 2020 survey, the results will be the subject of a specific analysis in the second part of our development.

2 It represents a regional assembly that brings together policy makers in charge of executive power.

3 The CFA UNIV has led ten apprenticeship-to-work surveys on the transition-to-work track record of sandwich-course leavers in 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020. The term *leaver* refers to where the student surveyed currently stands: he/she either (i) graduated from the last vocational training course they attended, left school and is currently in (or looking for) work, or (ii) failed to graduate or dropped out mid-year and does not envisage going back to school. The student is therefore currently in (or looking for) work. The 2020 survey will allow to analyze the localized consequences of the global pandemic crisis on the nature of vocational integration students-apprentices from the University of Corsica.

4 Exact figures put the survey response rates from the sandwich-placement students concerned at 87.8% in 2011 (157 respondents out of 179 surveyed), 82.5% in 2012 (99 respondents out of 120 surveyed), 84.4% in 2013 (151 respondents out of 179 surveyed), 86.1% (136 respondents out of 158 surveyed) in 2014, 95,2% (161 respondents out of 169 surveyed) in 2015, 86.1% (158 respondents out of 171 surveyed) in 2016, 86.1% in 2017 (173 respondents out of 181 surveyed), 91,4% (223 respondents out of 244 surveyed) in 2018, 93% (227 respondents out of 244 surveyed) in 2019. For the 2020 survey, the results will be the subject of a specific analysis in the second part of our development.

5 at the CFA UNIV, 98% of work-study students have the status of student-apprentice

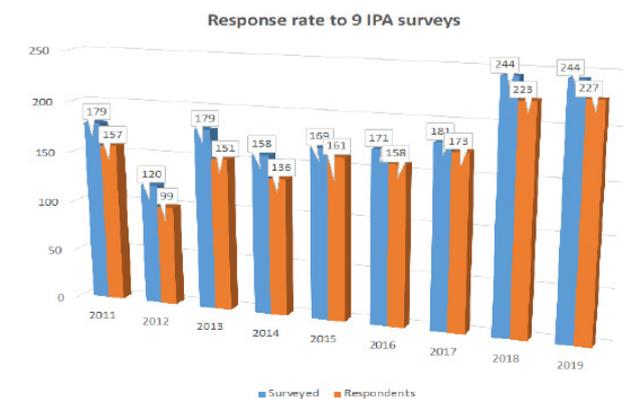


Figure 1. Response rate to 9 apprenticeship-work (IPA) surveys

6 Ten year average.

7 See earlier under point iii

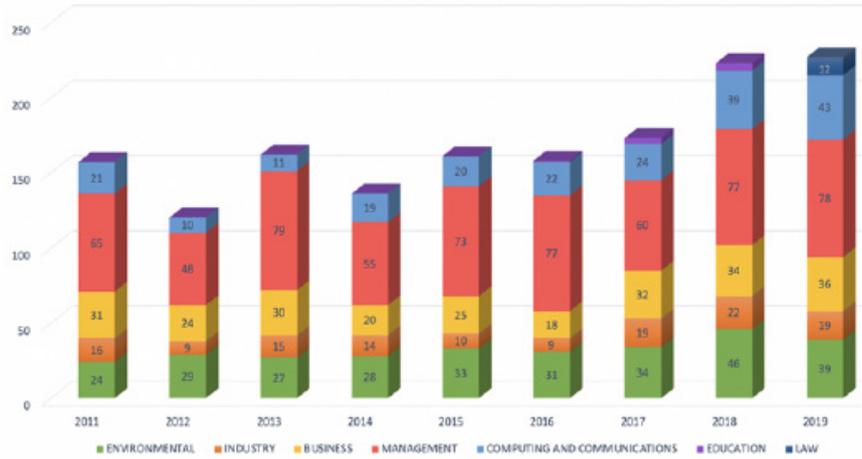


Figure 2. Distribution of outgoing students-apprentices in the 6 fields of activity representative of the island economy⁸

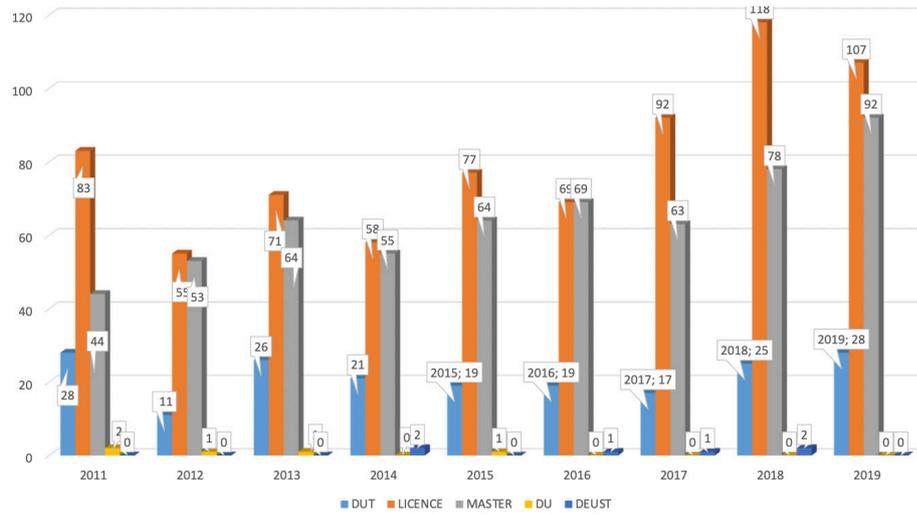


Figure 3. Distribution of outgoing students-apprentices broken down by diploma

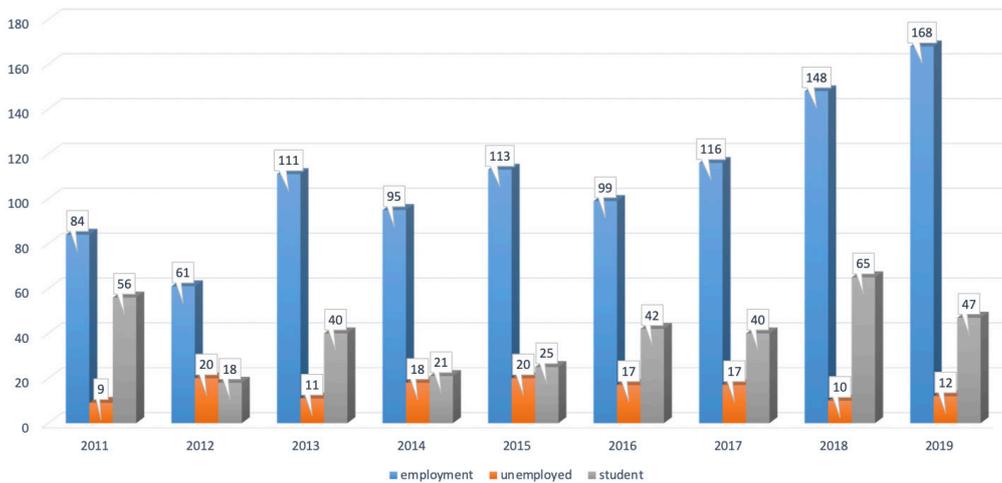


Figure 4. Vocational situation of outgoing students-apprentices

⁸ The field of education corresponds to a specific programme drawn up by the Ministry of Higher Education and Research

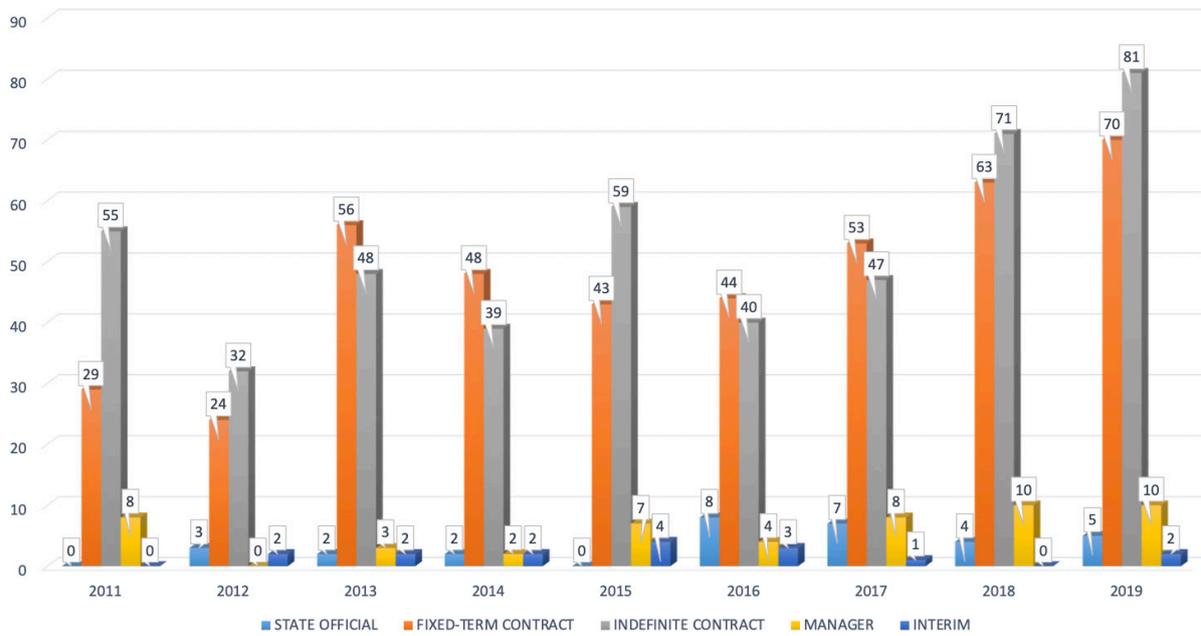


Figure 5. Nature of employment contracts by outgoing students-apprentices

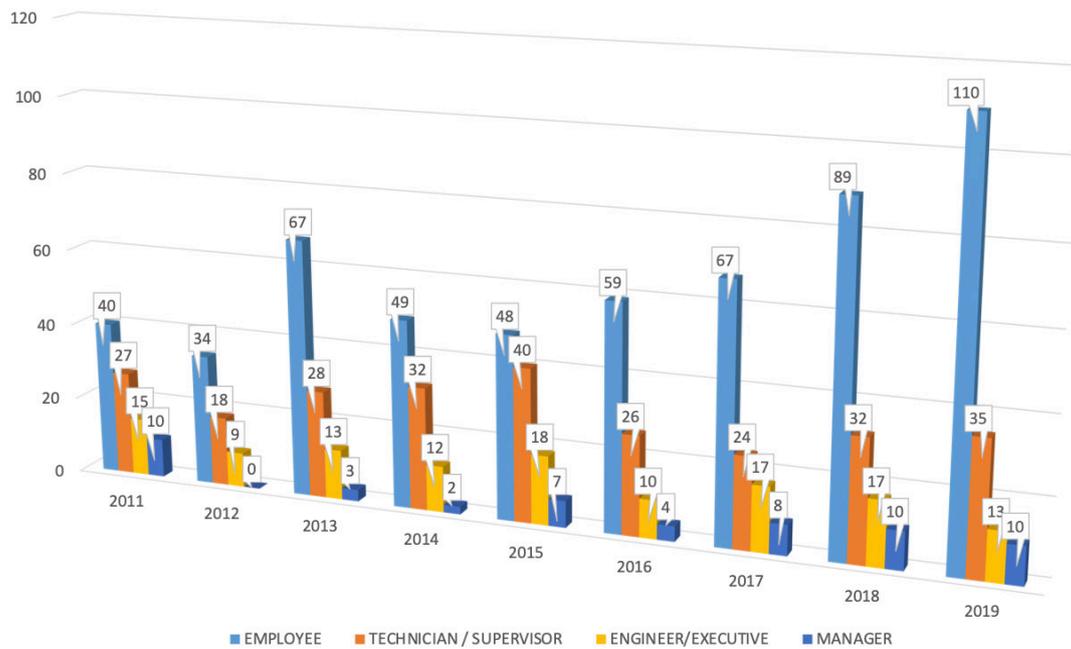


Figure 6. Occupational classification of jobs held by outgoing students-apprentices

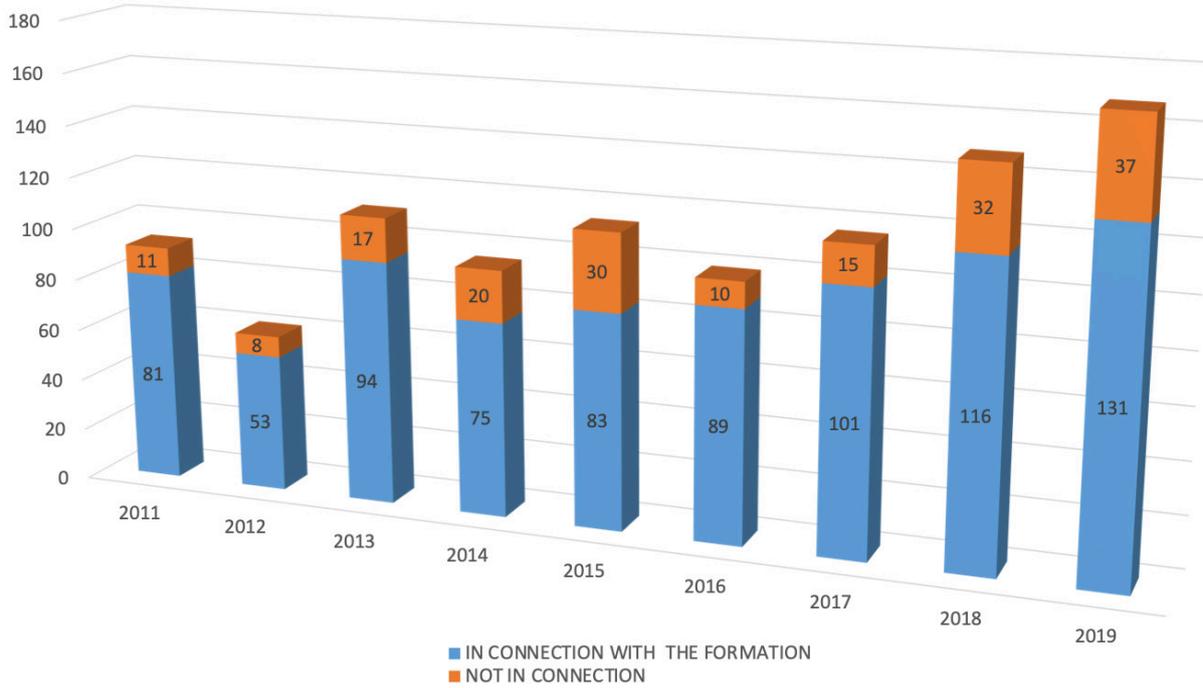


Figure 7. Matching training to employment for the outgoing students-apprentices

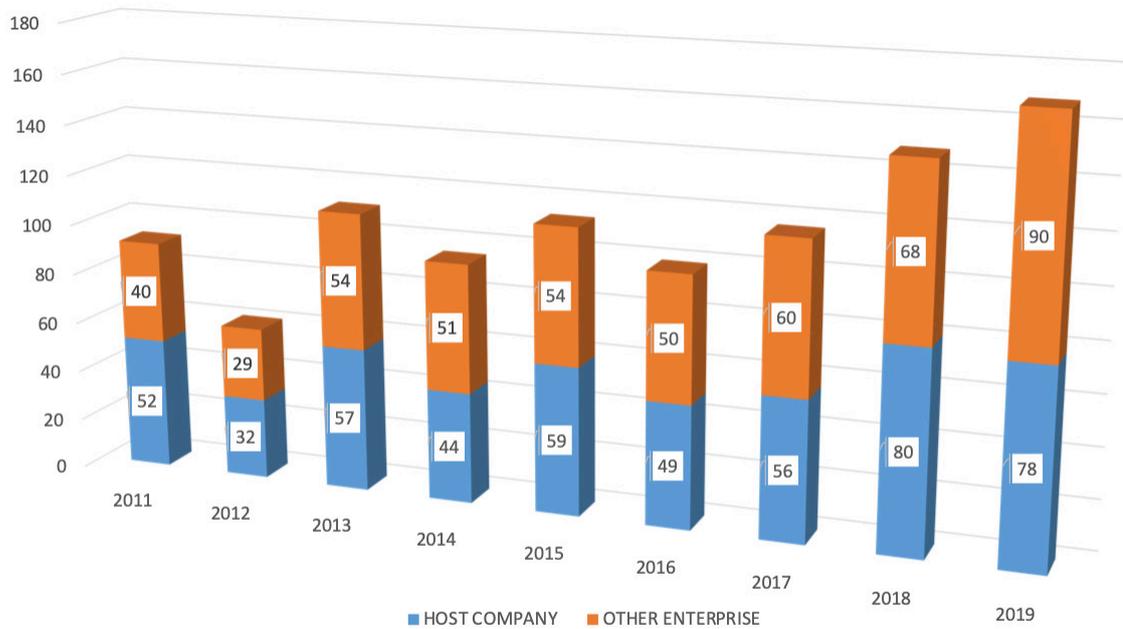


Figure 8. Place of insertion of the outgoing students-apprentices

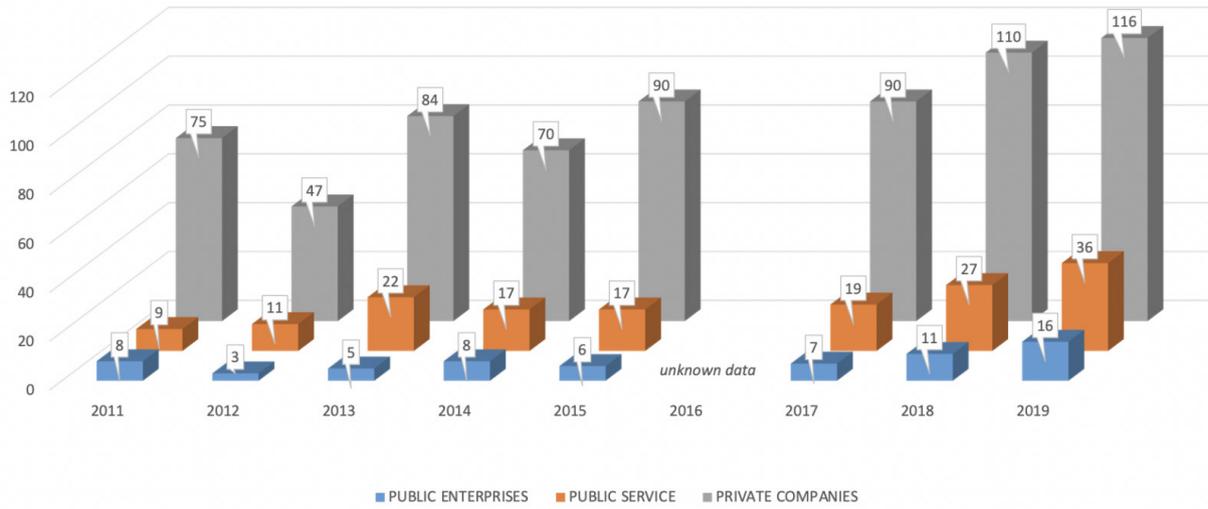


Figure 9. Type of structures taking on outgoing students-apprentices⁹

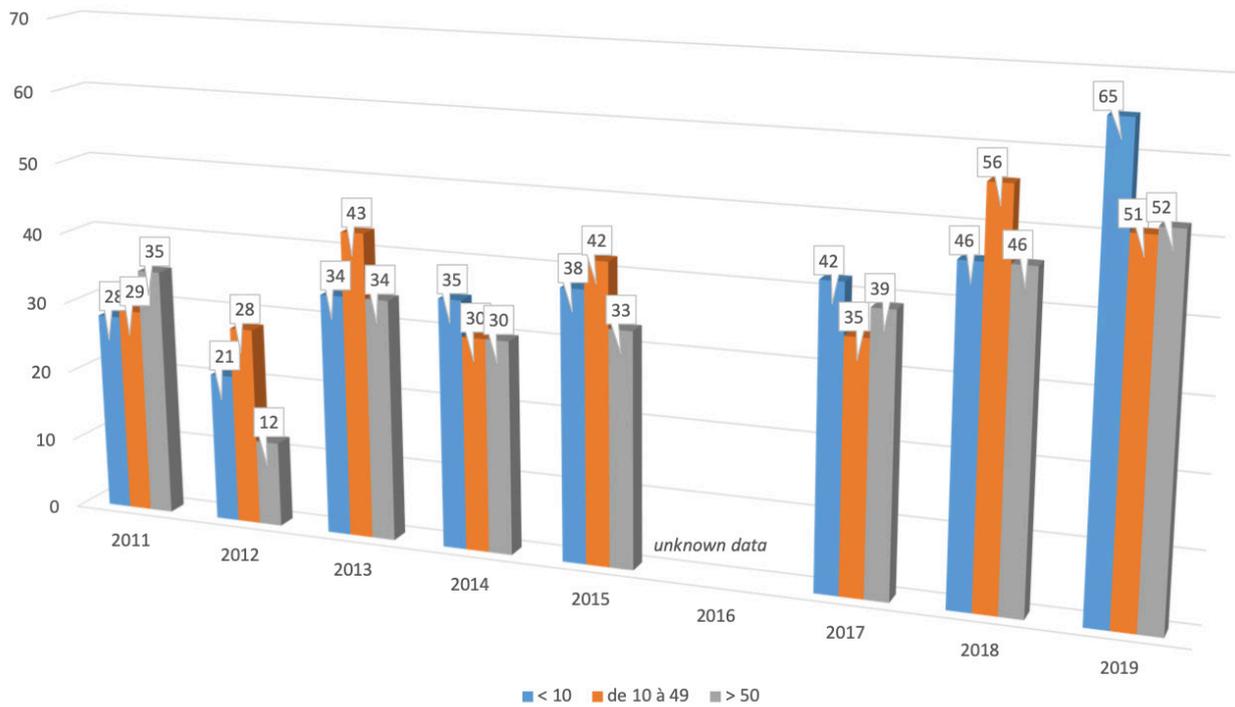


Figure 10. Size of structures taking on students-apprentices outgoing¹⁰

9 Unavailable data in 2016

10 Unavailable data in 2016

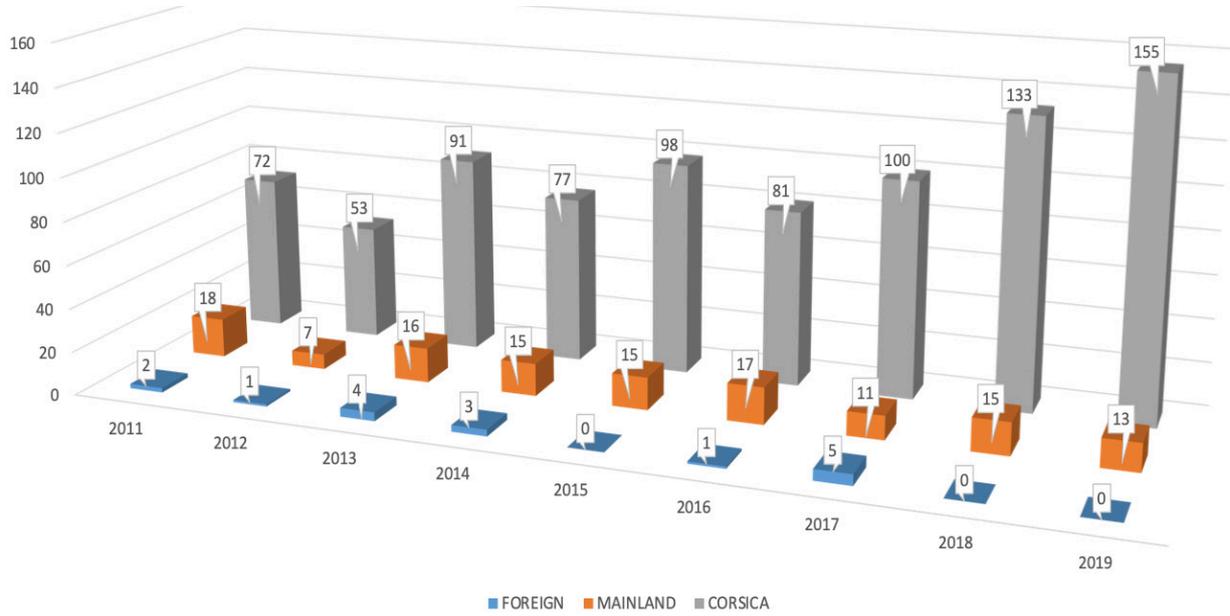


Figure 11. Jobs' localization of outgoing students-apprentices

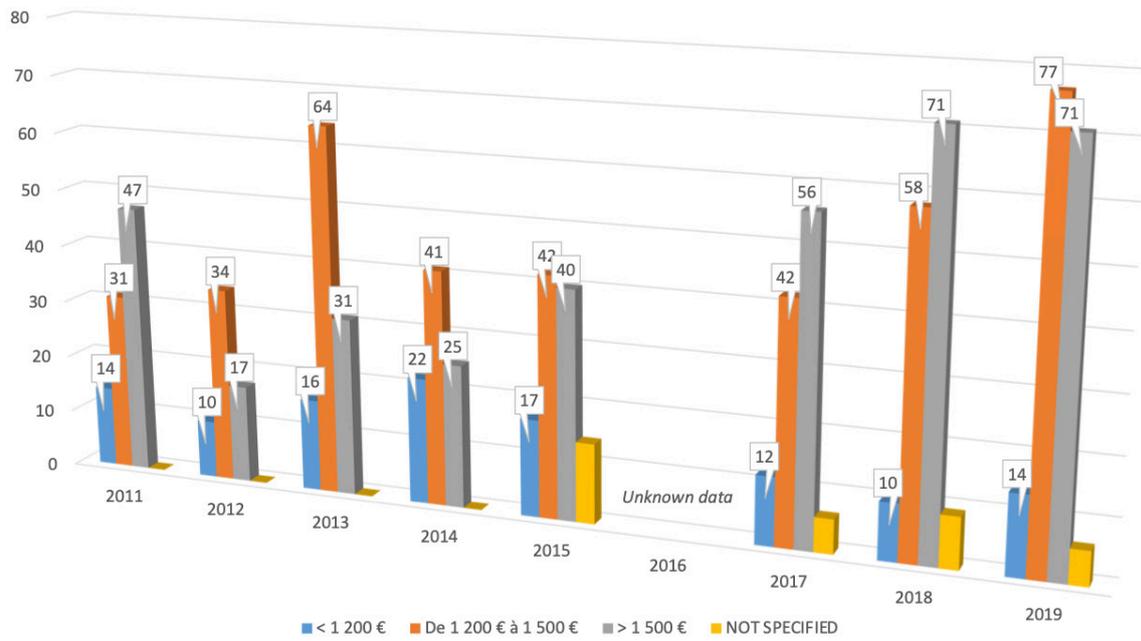


Figure 12. Remuneration of outgoing students-apprentices¹¹

¹¹ Unavailable data in 2016

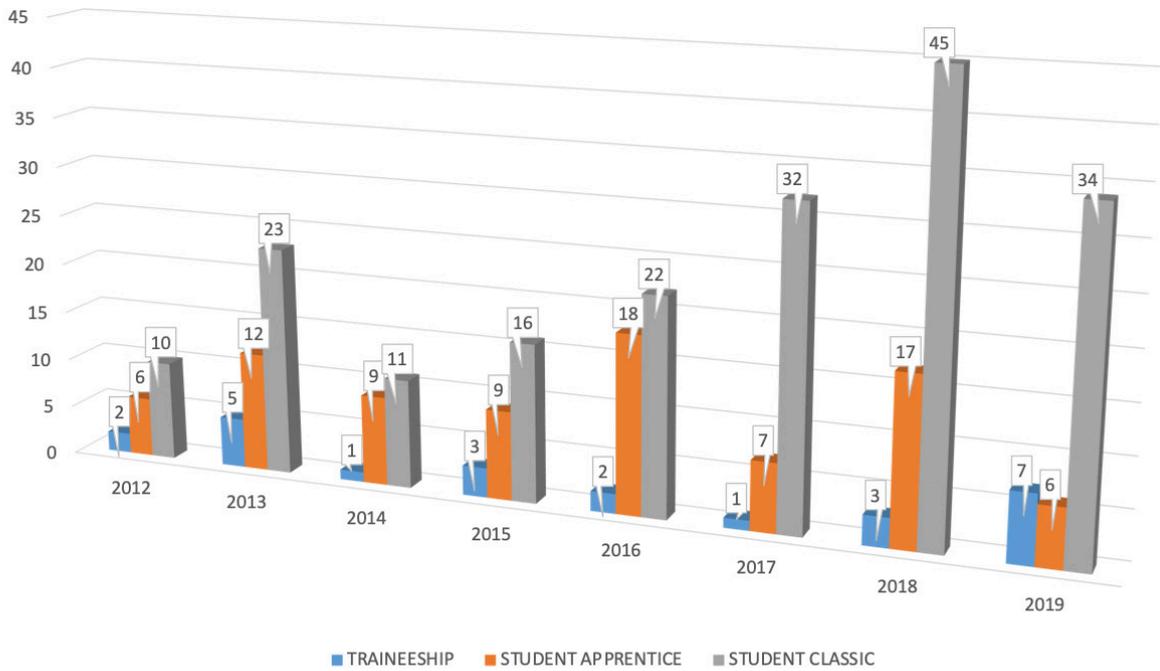


Figure 13. Situation of outgoing students-apprentices pursuing studies at another institution

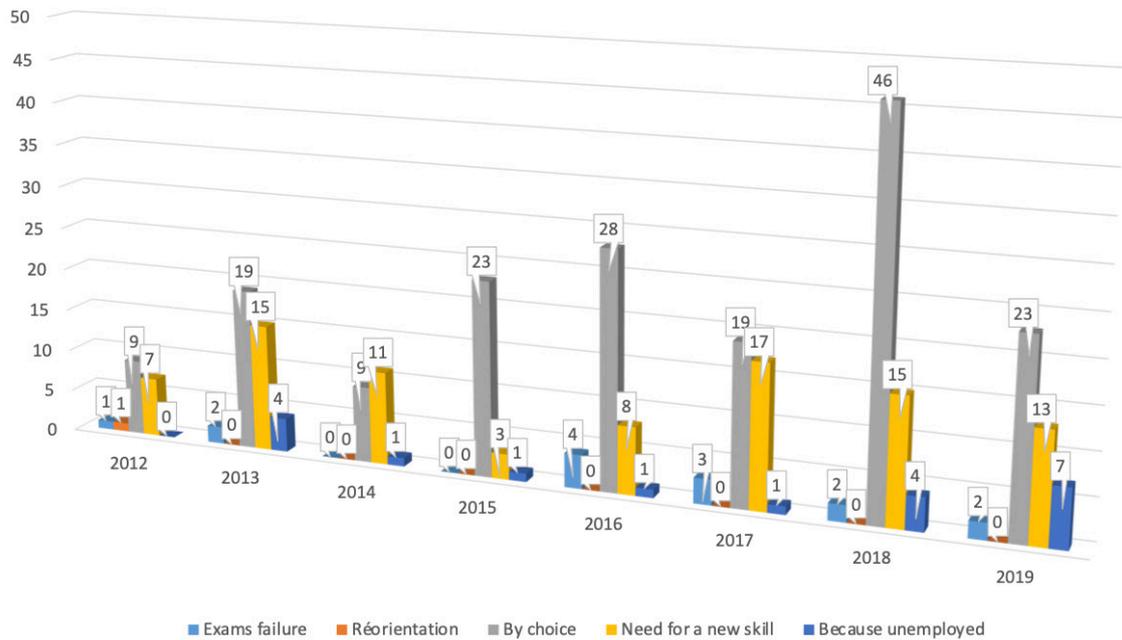


Figure 14. Reasons pushing outgoing students-apprentices to continue in education at another institution

With a view to finalizing a regional development scheme based on the quest for an economy of knowledge and competence, the results of the nine IPA surveys conducted by CFAUNIV provide local executive authorities with concrete data and trends, in particular on the strategic direction to be taken in the field of lifelong learning in Higher Education.

A set of salient data¹² characterizes a new structural reality:

✓68,3% of graduating students-apprentices are in employment less than 6 months after their last course;

✓81,2% of jobs are related to training, with 88% located in Corsica;

✓55.6% of the jobs obtained are of a sustainable nature, of which 10.3% are linked to business start-ups or takeovers;

✓42,1% of wages received (excluding premium) are above €1,500;

✓86,9% of educational pursuits were motivated to acquire complementary skills or by personal choice and only 5.3% were motivated by the inability to find a job;

✓69% of jobs are identified in small and medium-sized enterprises, in line with the typical economic fabric of Corsica.

In addition to its ability to ensure quality professional integration, the apprenticeship training system at the University of Corsica is also a path of excellence since 70% of the promotion majors resulting from these 40 training courses for mixed audiences (classical students, students-apprentices, active) are students-apprentices.

Over the period 2012-2019, the surveys monitoring the vocational integration of students-apprentices clearly perpetuate the cardinal values conveyed by the system of apprenticeship in Higher Education in general, and at the University of Corsica in particular:

✓a graduation rate of around 95% (this trend is strengthening between 2011 and 2019 while the number of students-apprentices tripled between these two dates);

✓an increasing qualitative level of integration into the labour market, symbolized by training largely related to the job held and a strong awareness of entrepreneurship through work experience acquired by apprenticeship;

✓an active and permanent contribution to the structuring of a socio-economic fabric composed 95% of very small businesses, craftsmen and traders.

Have the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the local economy and the structural disruptions in the labour market in 2020 countered this virtuous 10-year trend?

3. Analysis of the Pandemic COVID-19 Crisis Impact on the Vocational Integration Students-Apprentices in a Small Island Economy

The COVID-19 pandemic has economic consequences, which even one year into the spread of the virus, remain difficult to assess. The economic crisis has unfolded in three acts for now and two more could follow. The first act began in January when China was closing many production sites in that country and disrupting supplies in many sectors of activity, and that was the supply shock. The spread of the virus then leads to the second act of this crisis, the shock of demand, at the time of the establishment of containment in several countries. In addition, the globalization of the economy increases the emancipation power of firms towards their host territories^[14]. The latter are now facing a frantic race to attractiveness in which competition is fierce^[15].

In France, on 12 March 2020, President Macron delivers a speech aimed at jointly ensuring the health of French citizens and the rescue of the French economy. *“Everything will be done to protect our employees and to protect our companies, whatever the cost”* he said. To do this, he announced an exceptional and massive mechanism including the introduction of partial unemployment. To this end, a € 100 billion recovery plan will be put in place.

3.1 The Specific Situation of the Corsican Economy

In Corsica, in spite of the State taking over the compensation of employees forced to stay at home and the postponement of the payment of contributions and taxes due for all companies wishing to do so without justification, without formality, the economic health of the small enterprises, which make up the bulk of the island's economic fabric, was weakened during 2020.

According to the 2020 economic barometer, carried out by the Institute of the chartered accountants, the Corsican small and medium-sized enterprises were the most affected in France in 2020. The barometer was based on cumulative turnover (ICAC) to draw up a national assessment of the decline in activity. In France, Corsica is the most affected region with a fall in activity of -14.1%. Then comes the Île-de-France with -13.1%. Dependent on a strong tourism seasonality, which accounts for nearly 33% of local GDP, Corsica suffered the full force of the decline in its tourism activity in 2020. The study demonstrates the hotel industry recorded a cumulative decrease in sales of -44.4% nationally in 2020. Another tourism-related sector was traditional catering, which fell -38.7%. Only the construction sector managed to make it through, with a

¹² nine-year average figures

decline of -4.7%.

A priori, these figures, characteristic of a declining economic situation, both at national and local level, should not be beneficial to the vocational integration of students-apprentices.

3.2 The Paradox of the Students-Apprentices Professional Integration in 2020

In 2020, the CFA UNIV conducted its annual survey (IPA) of follow-up of outgoing students-apprentices. The specific methodology for the implementation of the follow-up survey on the vocational integration of students-apprentices (mail out questionnaires, email and phone reminders) enabled an average response rate of 93% (i.e. 213 respondents out of 229 people surveyed), which is a statistically representative panel of the total population concerned.

The results and data presented below emerge from the IPA survey (apprenticeship -> employment) carried out by the CFA UNIV in 2020.

As previous studies have shown¹³, Figure 15 confirms that outgoing students-apprentices come primarily from the fields of

management and IT – communication. They are also enrolled mainly in training courses related to these disciplines.

Nevertheless in 2020, the rate of occupational integration of outgoing students-apprentices is higher than that of the last 9 years. 170 are employed, 24 are unemployed and 19 are pursuing education. 79.8% of outgoing students-apprentices are in employment less than 6 months after their last course versus 68,3% on average over the period 2011-2019. In addition, Figure 16 shows that no students-apprentices who continue their studies do so because they are unemployed. This is a real difference from the findings in Figure 14. It is very largely by choice that outgoing students-apprentices decide to continue their studies in another training center.

On the qualitative nature of the vocational integration of outgoing students-apprentices, the study reveals that:

58.9% of the jobs obtained are of a sustainable nature (versus 55.6 % during the last 9 years), of which 12.3% are linked to business start-ups or takeovers;

87.5% of students-apprentices involved in the start-up or takeover of companies say that their professional project is directly related to graduate training (Figure 17);

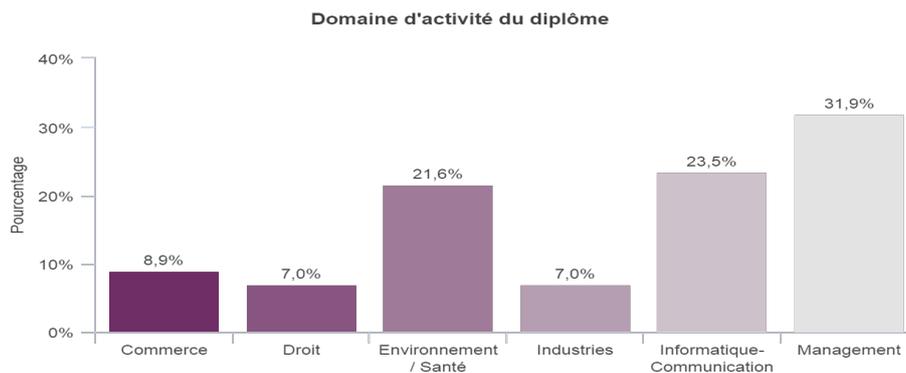


Figure 15. Distribution of outgoing students-apprentices in the 6 fields of activity representative of the island economy in 2020

Vous êtes en contrat d'apprentissage ou poursuivez vos études

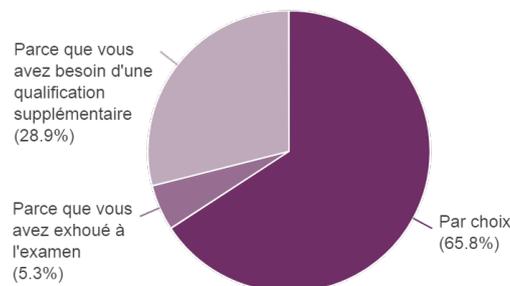


Figure 16. Reasons pushing outgoing students-apprentices to continue in education in 2020

13 See *supra* Figure 2.

La création de votre entreprise est-elle en lien avec la formation que vous avez suivie?

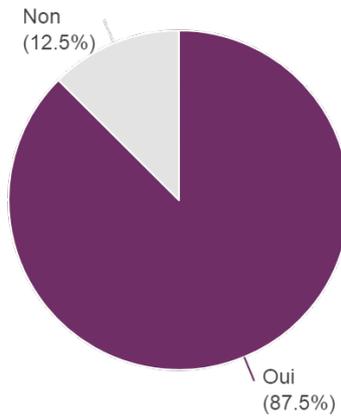


Figure 17. link between the training followed and the business creation or takeover project in 2020

50,7 % of wages received (excluding premium) are above €1,500 (versus 42,1% during the last 9 years), as shown in Figure 18;

Quel est votre salaire mensuel? (Salaire net)

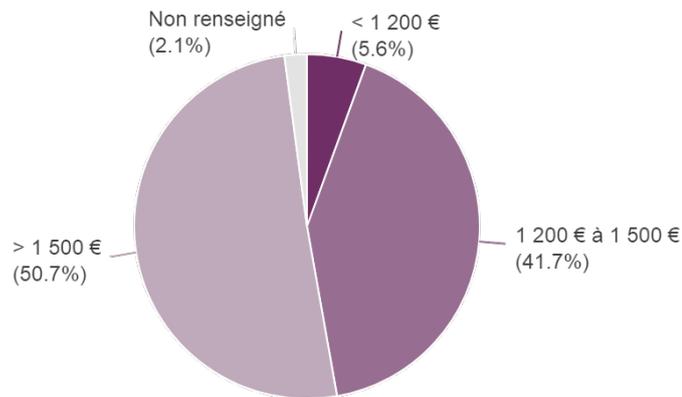


Figure 18. wages of jobs held in 2020

About 50% of students-apprentices training companies hire them at the end of their training (Figure 19). This confirms a structural trend observed between 2011 and 2019 (see Figure 8).

Votre entreprise actuelle est-elle la même que celle dans laquelle vous étiez apprenti?

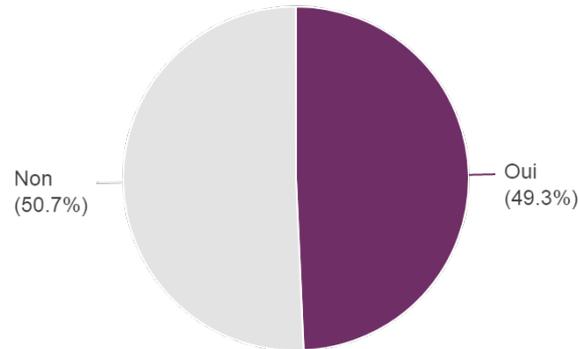


Figure 19. Insertion place of the outgoing students-apprentices in 2020

More synthetically, a set of key figures characterizes the reality of graduate students-apprentices vocational integration from the University of Corsica in 2020:

- ✓83% of jobs are related to training, with 91% located in Corsica;

- ✓72% of jobs are identified in small and medium-sized enterprises, in line with the typical economic fabric of Corsica.

- ✓92% of outgoing students-apprentices consider the training taken as satisfactory.

In the end, given the consequences of the pandemic crisis of COVID-19 on the economy of Corsica (one of the regions most affected in France in terms of lower business turnover), the results of the 2020 study on the vocational integration outgoing students-apprentices seem to reflect a paradoxical observation.

In fact, graduate students-apprentices are more inserted and better paid, located mostly in a territory in which the economic fabric has been particularly impacted by the consequences of the health situation.

This reality clearly shows that the apprenticeship system protects the vocational integration of outgoing students-apprentices in an unusual and particularly uncertain economic context. This observation also demonstrates the major involvement of the island small and medium businesses in a type of training which ensures their own structuring.

4. Conclusions

According to the INSEE¹⁴ Economic Update published on December 15, 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic generated an overall 7% decline in French GDP and a loss of 600,000 jobs in 2020 on French territory. Small island economies such as Corsica, heavily dependent on the seasonality of tourist activity, have seen the foundation of their economic fabric deeply weakened.

In this exceptionally gloomy context, the apprenticeship training system seems to have been spared the economic consequences of the health crisis.

Thanks to government support measures for the signing of apprenticeship contracts since 1 July 2020¹⁵, the growth of apprenticeship has continued despite the unprecedented health situation. In the private sector, the number of apprenticeship contracts increased by 40% in 2020 to a record 500,000¹⁶. For the first time, 58% of contracts were concluded as part of Higher Education training.

However, in 2020, there was no guarantee that the vocational integration of graduate students-apprentices at the University of Corsica would show signs of superior quality.

In 2020, the latter proved to be better overall, both in quantitative terms (79.8% of outgoing students-apprentices are employed less than 6 months after graduation compared to 68.3% on average over the period 2011-2019) that at the qualitative level (50.7% of salaries received are

¹⁴ National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies

¹⁵ See <https://www.service-public.fr/particuliers/actualites/A14253>

¹⁶ See <https://www.gouvernement.fr/sites/default/files/contenu/piece-jointe/2021/02/chiffres-apprentissage-2020.pdf>

above €1,500 against 42.1% on average over the period 2011-2019). At the same time, the students-apprentices have maintained a high level of employability by enjoying a high degree of freedom from their training companies.

This is the proof that apprenticeship training in Higher Education sustains its credibility in a context of crisis thanks to the role of major player assumed by small and medium-sized enterprises in Corsica, who view the apprenticeship contract experience as a pre-hire phase. They need to structure themselves and apprenticeship training is the optimal strategy to meet their human resource needs, while securing their hiring process.

Overall, the construction of a knowledge-based and competence-based economy in Corsica could be sustainably structured around, inter alia, the joint development of apprenticeship and continuing vocational training in Higher Education.

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