

The changing nature and role of vocational education and training in Europe

WORK ASSIGNMENT 2

External factors influencing VET - Understanding the National Policy
Dimension: Country Case Studies

AO/DSI/JP/Changing_Role_of_Vet/009/15

Case study focusing on France

prepared for CEDEFOP – European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

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The changing nature and role of vocational education and training – overall aims

The purpose of the Changing nature and role of VET-project is to improve our understanding of how VET is changing in the countries belonging to the European Union (as well as Iceland and Norway). Over a three-year period (2016-18) the project will analyse how vocationally oriented education and training has changed in the past two decades (1995-2015) and based on these results investigate the main challenges and opportunities facing the sector today and in the future. Work is divided into six separate but interlinked themes:

- (a) the changing definition and conceptualisation of VET;
- (b) the external drivers influencing VET developments;
- (c) the role of traditional VET at upper secondary level;
- (d) VET from a lifelong learning perspective;
- (e) the role of VET at higher education levels;
- (f) scenarios outlining alternative development paths for European VET in the 21st century.

The study takes as its starting point that vocationally oriented education and training is something more than the traditional VET delivered at upper secondary level (in the form of school-based education or training, apprenticeships, or combinations of these). Due to the requirements of lifelong learning, we are able to observe diversification of VET with new institutions and stakeholders involved. We also see an expansion of VET to higher education areas, partly through reform of existing institutions, partly through the emergence of new institutions. This has been caused by factors internal to the education and training system as well as by external pressures linked to demographic, technological and economic changes.

This particular case study, together with 9 other case studies, provides input to theme (b) of the project ('The external drivers influencing VET developments').

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France

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I. Introduction

In France, vocational education and training (VET) is delivered through four different pathways:

1. Initial vocational education (IVET) delivered in schools, primarily administered by the Ministry of Education, but also other Ministries (Agriculture, Health and Social Affairs, National Defence, and the Ministry of Youth and Sports) and Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Chambers of Trades and Crafts (*Chambres des métiers et de l'artisanat*) and Chambers of Agriculture;
2. IVET through Apprenticeships;
3. continuous vocational training (CVET) organised by ministries (mainly Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour/Employment, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Health and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Industry), local authorities (Regional Councils), Chambers of Commerce and Industry, industry branches and enterprises themselves; and
4. recognition and validation of informally acquired competences: *validation des acquis de l'expérience* (VAE) since 2002.

The network of training institutions – which are supervised by the Ministry of Labour and Employment - delivers certifications referred to as '*titres professionnels*', which are different from educational degrees but are nevertheless registered in the French National Framework of Qualifications (RNCP) by the National Commission of Professional Certification (CNCP).¹

Private sector organisations also deliver vocational qualifications / certificates (*certificats de qualification professionnelle*). Collective agreements which apply to various industrial branches validate competences related to specific tasks or responsibilities and award certificates directly. The requirements are defined in the agreements with the trade unions at branch/industry sector level (*conventions collectives*). While the *titres professionnels* awarded by the Ministry of Labour are recognised at national level and registered in the national qualification framework by the CNCP, the industry-awarded certificates (*certificats de qualification professionnelle*) are not automatically registered. For example, the French banking sector has its own complete system of VET and its own qualifications which are not automatically recognised and classified by the National Qualification Framework (NFQ).

Thus, if we add all the diplomas awarded by the ministries and other public or semi-public bodies, - encompassing the *titres professionnels* awarded by the Ministry of Labour's network and the *certificats de qualification professionnelle* which are delivered by industry branches - there are about 8,000 different vocational certifications awarded in France.

This first feature of the French VET system shows its complexity and the high number of decision makers and stakeholders involved in VET, which does not necessarily fit with the image of the French

¹ RNCP: Répertoire National des Certifications Professionnelles' (French NQF); CNCP 'Commission Nationale de la Certification Professionnelle' (set up in 2002).

system in some international studies which describe it as a rather simple, heavily centralised one run mainly by the state and other public authorities.

A second major feature of the VET system in France is the differentiation of three major tracks in upper secondary education: (i) a general academic track; (ii) a technological track; and (iii) a vocational track.

In June 2000, all current legislation concerning education was consolidated in an overarching Education Code (*Code de l'Éducation*). Schooling in France is compulsory from the ages of 6 to 16 years; about 99% of children also attend pre-primary school from the age of 3 and 35% from the age of 2. For enrolment at this early age, priority access is given to children from disadvantaged social backgrounds, in particular, those from '*zones d'éducation prioritaire*' (priority educational areas). Following their four-year lower secondary education (known as '*collège*'), students who wish to follow a vocational pathway may choose between either a vocational stream within a senior high school, which is called a (*Lycée professionnel, LP*) or an apprenticeship, with time shared between an enterprise and an apprenticeship training centre (*Centre de Formation d'Apprentis, CFA*). In the vocational stream, studies in both a *lycée professionnel* and in the apprenticeship tracks include periods of theory-based learning and experience in an enterprise. In the LP courses, there are compulsory periods of workplace training lasting between three and ten weeks each year, depending on the diploma and the speciality. The legal status of learners is different in LP (student) and in apprenticeship/CFA (worker status under labour legislation).

2. What is meant by VET and the national VET system

VET in France is translated to '*Enseignement et formation professionnels*' and is not defined officially in the *Code de l'éducation*. As a matter of fact, it can be perceived and interpreted in different ways, as it may apply to different types of education and training.

The traditional distinction between IVET and CVET is becoming less relevant in the content of the importance accorded lifelong learning (LLL) as reflected in the recommendations of the European Council and the European Commission. This is not only due to the fact that some students attend training sessions after a short interruption in their course, it is also due to the fact that even compulsory education is increasingly influenced by expectations from employers and society in terms of core skills and competences, including transversal competences and soft skills. The more general paradigm is that VET allows students to acquire skills, competences, attitudes, behaviours and knowledge required to find a job at any time during working life.

VET has a specific meaning when it applies to the vocational upper secondary track either in the LP or through apprenticeships. It refers to either a two-year course in order to obtain a '*Certificat d'Aptitude Professionnelle*' (CAP) which corresponds to level EQF3, or to a three-year education preparing to earn a '*baccalauréat professionnel*' (*Bac Pro*) which is classified at level EQF4.

VET can also apply to higher education, something that is increasingly common as a greater number of study programmes are available to prepare individuals for professional qualifications. This is the case for qualifications at levels EQF 5, 6 and 7 in many domains: engineering, trade and management, medicine, law, etc. The higher technological studies provided by schools (engineering or business schools) can lead to a qualification recognised as a Master's degree by legal regulations or, depending upon the curriculum leading, to a more specific VET qualification. Therefore, the question remains open on whether or not to include both types of studies within VET. As for apprenticeships, there are also (since the 1990s) possibilities to obtain an engineering degree. Therefore, it seems consistent to include such training in IVET.

With regard to the perceptions of the public and employers, IVET in France refers mainly to qualifications at EQF levels 3, 4 and 5; but legally, a '*licence professionnelle*' is recognised at level 6 and a Master's qualification could be recognised at level 7 (though this is not yet the case within the French NQF).

There is no single definition of VET in France in the legal texts but there are descriptions of VET sub-systems, formulations of objectives of qualifications in terms of learning outcomes and descriptions of knowledge and skills to be acquired (*référentiels de certification*).² These educational and assessment standards are themselves determined by occupational standards, which are defined by professional consultative commissions (CPC) including employers, trade union representatives and educationists (teachers, trainers and curriculum experts). Originally established in 1972, a decree of May 2007 reorganised the *Commissions Professionnelles Consultatives (CPC)*. Now there are 14 CPC under the Ministry of Education: one for each large sector of economic activity; for example: Metallurgy, Food Industry, Chemistry/Bio-industry/environment, or Trade and Distribution.

The image of IVET at upper secondary level remains weak despite the continuous efforts of the government to improve this image because the general academic and technological tracks are regarded as recruiting better students and are considered to lead to more prestigious and better paid jobs. But the image of higher vocational education is still quite positive.

3. The historical development of VET

Since the mid-1980s, successive governments have adopted measures in order to make VET more attractive and improve its effectiveness, as well as its capacity to take into account the evolution of the labour market and provide the new skills required by the employers in a fast changing economy and society.

The main changes that had an impact on its image and attractiveness were:

- the creation of the vocational baccalauréat (*bac pro*) in 1985;
- the laws of 1993 and 2009 giving major power to the regions;
- the possibility to take higher education exams through apprenticeships starting in the 1990s; and
- more recently, in 2009, the decision to prepare the '*baccalauréat professionnel*' in three years (instead of four years as before) to make it the same as the technological and the general baccalauréat.

The decision to create the vocational baccalauréat (*baccalauréat professionnel*) increased considerably the attractiveness of upper secondary VET because the upper secondary vocational pathway could now lead to a certification at level EQF4, or still higher as it opened the possibility to go on to higher education, mainly through two types of two-year post-baccalauréat institutions:

5. the 'sections de technicien supérieur' (STS) (post-baccalauréat classes in 'lycées généraux et technologiques' (LEGT) preparing for a 'Brevet de Technicien Supérieur' (BTS);

² Ministry of Education (2002) *L'enseignement professionnel en France*, DGESCO; Cedefop (2008) *Vocational education and training in France, Luxembourg*; Ministry of Education (2010) *L'Education Nationale et la formation professionnelle en France*, DGESCO; Cedefop ReferNet France (2013). *VET in Europe: country report France*; IGEN-IGAEN (2016) *Cartographie de l'enseignement professionnel en France*, Ministry of Education

6. the '*Instituts Universitaires de Technologie*' (IUT) institutions which are within universities and prepare for a '*Diplôme Universitaire de Technologie*' (DUT).

Both of these official qualifications are at level EQF5 and are increasingly followed by a supplementary year of training leading to a '*licence professionnelle*' (professional Bachelor) which is a qualification at level EQF6.

In 2009, another measure to make IVET more attractive was to offer the possibility to complete the '*baccalauréat professionnel*' in three years. One should also mention in this respect the creation of special classes that allow the participant to join the technological track or the general track after two years in the vocational track (*classes d'adaptation*). This reform led changes affecting the qualification degree at level EQF3 – the '*Brevet d'études Professionnelles*' (BEP) which gave a broader qualification (less specialised) than the vocational degree at the same level: the '*Certificat d'Aptitude professionnelle*' (CAP). This degree is now the only national vocational qualification at level EQF3. The BEP is no longer a degree it is just an intermediary qualification for the students studying towards a vocational baccalauréat (*'bac pro'*) at level EQF4.

Another important feature of the French VET system is the large number of degrees and qualifications and the fact that the learning outcomes required to obtain a qualification are defined by special commissions grouping representatives of employers, of trade unions and of teachers and trainers (*Commissions Professionnelles Consultatives* or CPC). These commissions define occupational standards, as well as educational and assessment standards (*référentiels de compétence*). Moreover, in order to take into account the new expectations in terms of skills and competences the qualifications are modified on average every five years. It should be noted that for certain specialities the assessment standards are considered too general and do not sufficiently take into account the competences required in the tasks of the jobs the students are preparing to enter.

The supply of qualifications provided by IVET in France offers 187 specialities in the CAP (level EQF3), 101 specialities in the vocational baccalauréats (EQF4), and 134 specialities in the BTS (EQF5). But such a large diversity does not lead to satisfactory entry to the labour market, and nor does it meet the expectations of employers. According to the surveys carried out in 2013 and 2014 by the Ministry of Education and by the *Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches sur les Qualifications* (CEREQ), 57% of the students who had passed the CAP (EQF3) and 46% of students who had passed a *Bac Pro* in the LP (EQF4), were unemployed seven months after graduation. Moreover, three years after graduation about a third of the CAP holders and a fifth of *Bac Pro* graduates were still unemployed. Also, to find a job implies either accepting a job in a sector which does not correspond to the speciality of the qualification obtained and / or a job for which the individual is relatively highly qualified to enter. One reason for this is the lack of foresight studies integrated at regional levels, and the lack of dynamic interaction between supply and demand of qualifications other than over the short-term.

This weakness of the VET system is illustrated by the coexistence of a shortage of people with certain qualifications in selected economic sectors, while the number of students registered in some other qualifications exceeds their demand in the economy. Whatever the economic sector, about 20% of the CAP specialities attract more than 80% of the students, and at level EQF4 the three-year *Bac Pro* in metallurgy sector attracts around 40% students in the industry sector. In the tertiary sector, this concentration is even higher: two *Bac Pro* ('trade/commerce' and 'administration and finance') attract more than two thirds of students. Another aspect is a gender issue: in the production sector, 80% of students are men while in the tertiary sector 70% are women.

Another contradiction which is not easy to solve is that, in order to take into account the expectations in terms of general knowledge and transversal competences, the syllabus of the *Bac Pro*

(the first objective of which is to prepare the student to enter the labour market) now has an increased share of general academic subjects (to make it more attractive to would –be students). Consequently there is a shortage of *Bac Pro* graduates in certain economic sectors. The 2016 report of the Inspectorate of the Ministry of Education (op.cit.) explains this tendency with respect to French public opinion's traditional, hierarchic vision of education according to which VET has lowly position. Another drawback of the shift to increase the share of general knowledge subjects in the curriculum at the cost of more vocational ones, is the increasing difficulties some students have in passing the examinations.³

It appears that the most important feature of the evolution of VET over the last 30 years is the increasing level of educational attainment of the population (students and those in employment) in order to meet the new expectations of the labour market and thus increasing the prestige and attractiveness of IVET and CVET.⁴ This evolution was reinforced by the development of the recognition of informally acquired competences (*Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience*, or VAE) mainly since 2002.⁵

Another significant change over the last 20 years have been the new approaches in terms of learning outcomes and a more individualised pedagogy such as that found in most other European countries.⁶ There was not any modularisation in upper secondary IVET. It was introduced only in adult continuing education and recently in higher education for some '*brevets de technicien supérieur*' (BTS). Within a general tendency in France to adopt some flexibility in order to facilitate individual pathways, it is increasingly seen as a possible development in IVET.

In the recent period, a process of decentralisation has given more responsibilities to the regional level in the field of IVET as well as CVET. The law of 2014 gives regions authority over vocational training, career advice and coordinating job support policies: managing training policies, implementation of VET including apprenticeships for young people and adults and supporting small and medium size enterprises in their territory. This new law also created regional public training services and regional public guidance services. The dynamics created by this decentralisation process is an essential element of VET strategy that contributes to more effective public action by bringing the decision-making and management bodies close to local realities.⁷

³ Asked in 2015 of a outstandingly efficient craftsman working in an art foundry in a suburb of Paris what kind of qualification he had obtained, he answered none because the CAP (level EQF5) required the mastering of mathematics that that was much too abstract for him...

⁴ Doriath B. & Cuisinier, J.-F (2009), *La rénovation de la voie professionnelle: organisation et contenus des enseignements*, IGEN-IGAENR, MEN, Paris; Doriath, B. & Cuisinier, J.-F (2010), *Rapport sur le suivi de la mise en œuvre de la rénovation de la voie professionnelle*. IGEN-IGAENR. Paris.

⁵ Boudier Annie and Jean-Louis Kirsch (2007). 'The French VET system: like an unrecognised prototype'. *European Journal of Education* (42) 4; Bjornavold Jens and Isabelle Le Mouillour (2008) 'La validation des acquis d'apprentissage, un sujet d'actualité'. *Actualité de la Formation*, n° 21; Le Roux Annie (2013) 'La VAE dans les établissements d'enseignement supérieur de 2002 à 2011'. Note d'information n° 13-29. DEPP- MENESR, 2013; Cedefop (2014) *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning: country report France 2014* (by Claire Duchemin)

⁶ Cedefop (2008). *The shift to learning outcomes: conceptual, political and practical developments in Europe*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the EU; Cedefop (2012), *Curriculum Reform in Europe, the impact of learning outcomes*; Jellab Aziz (2005a) 'Les enseignants de lycée professionnel et leurs pratiques pédagogiques: entre lutte contre l'échec scolaire et mobilisation des élèves'. In: *Revue française de sociologie*, Vol 46 (2) Jellab A. (2005b) 'Le travail enseignant en lycée professionnel et ses paradoxes' (The paradoxes of teaching in vocational education). In: *Sociologie du travail*, No 47 ; Michel D. et al. (2012), *Suivi de la rénovation de la voie professionnelle, la certification intermédiaire*, IGEN-MEN, Paris

⁷ Cedefop (2016) *Spotlight on VET France*

Recurrent campaigns aimed at improving the image of IVET have been organised over the past 30 years, in particular to promote apprenticeships. The employment rate for apprentices is higher than for those who obtained their qualification at the same level through another means. This is particularly true at level EQF3. Apprenticeships are highly valued by employers.

Despite all the policy efforts to improve the attractiveness of IVET, this secondary track is still considered less prestigious than the general and the technological tracks. As was analysed recently, IVET is still attracting a majority of students who experienced difficulties in lower secondary education and/or who are from disadvantaged social backgrounds.⁸

As a means of improving career guidance, an increasing effort has been made to produce statistical data about the entry of young people into the labour market seven months after leaving school (see below, the link between VET and the labour market). But, overall, all reforms of VET for the past 30 years have been based more on an educational rationale rather than a vocational one, partly because of the great diversity of expectations from employers. In particular, there is a large difference between the big companies which prefer more transversal competences and thus appreciate more the Bac Pro (EQF4), and the small and medium size enterprises which prefer practical know how and more specialised skills and thus prefer the CAP and qualifications at level EQF3.⁹

4. Changes in VET enrolments

On the whole, the total enrolment of students in upper secondary IVET offered by the Ministry of Education has decreased slightly (-66 800 students) between 1995 and 2015¹⁰. In 2015, there were 1.1 million students in upper secondary vocational education: 700,000 in LP and 400,000 apprentices in the CFA.

Given the structural changes of upper secondary IVET (completion of the *Bac Pro* in three years and changes to the *BEP*) the statistics about the evolution of enrolment are not easy to interpret. The data about completion of qualifications are much more significant.

Table 1: Evolution of the completion of the main upper secondary IVET qualifications

	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015
CAP (EQF3)	260 673	215 623	145 913	154 265	188 386
Bac Pro (EQF 4)	65 936	92 617	93 268	118 586	176 646
Baccalauréat *	425 563	423 923	413 400	413 182	442 198

*General and technological baccalauréat

Source: www.education.gouv.fr/statistiques- *Repères et références statistiques* (each year from 1996 to 2016) - DEPP/Ministry of Education

⁸ CNESCO (2016) L'évolution de l'enseignement professionnel : des segmentations éducatives et sociales renouvelées ? Thibert Rémy (2015). Voie professionnelle, alternance, apprentissage : quelles articulations ? Dossier de veille de l'IFÉ, n°99

⁹ Thibert (2015). Op.cit., p. 11.; Maillard Fabienne (2013). Les diplômes professionnels de l'Éducation nationale entre scolarisation et professionnalisation, Les dossiers des sciences de l'éducation, n° 20.

¹⁰ Repères et références statistiques (2016) DEPP-Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, p. 96 and DEPP (2016) L'état de l'École, Ministry of National Education.

Over the period, a decrease in the number of *CAP* graduates can be observed, the relative stability of the general and technological baccalauréat, and a dramatic increase of the number of *bac pro* graduates mainly after the reform of 2009 (*Bac Pro* completed in three years instead of four). The establishment of '*campus des métiers et des qualifications*' by the law on education of 8th July 2013 and the decree of 29th September 2014 may have had a further positive impact, but this cannot be measured yet. These types of new campuses are tightly related to 'competitiveness economic poles' in each region. They should improve the better adaptation of students' skills to those that can be expected to be relevant in the economy in the future.

Table 2: Evolution of the enrolment for preparing qualifications at levels EQF5

	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015
BTS		238 894	230 403	242 247	256 066
DUT	96 158	116 095	111 296	112 350	116 397

BTS: *Brevet de Technicien Supérieur* (two years of higher education)

DUT: *Diplôme Universitaire de technologie* (two years of higher education)

Source: *Repères et références statistiques* (op.cit.)

There has been a moderate increase in the number of students enrolling in studies preparing a EQF5 qualification.

Table 3: Evolution of enrolment in apprenticeship since 1995

	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015
EQF3	232 135	245 333	228 613	191 857	162 226
EQF4	41 327	69 355	86 609	123 018	104 880
EQF5	15 273	35 553	44 233	62 074	71 419
EQF6/ 7	4 477	15 633	26 404	49 331	67 357
Total	293 512	365 874	385 859	426 280	405882

EQF3: CAP, Mentions Complémentaires et BEP

EQF4: *ac Pro* and other qualifications at the same level

EQF5: BTS

EQF6: Licence professionnelle (professional BA)

EQF7: Engineering diploma and Master

Source: *Repères et références statistiques 2016* (op. cit.) pp.138-139

This evolution shows an overall trend of increasing numbers of enrolments in apprenticeships (except over the most recent period) and a general increase of the qualification level: a decrease of enrolment at level EQF3 and a very significant increase at levels EQF4, 5, 6 and 7.

The decision in 1987 to authorise the centres of apprenticeship (*Centres de Formation d'Apprentis - CFA*) to prepare all vocational degrees (and not only the CAP as before) provides the basis for an increase of the share of apprenticeships. This also stems from increasing power of the regions in managing the supply of VET. For example, the enrolment of apprentices in CFA increased from 213000 in 1985/86 to 294,000 in 1995/96, 362,000 in 2004/2005, and 406,000 in 2014/2015 (despite a slight decrease between 2011 and 2014).

5. The interplay between external and internal factors shaping VET

Demographic context

The population of France in 2017 is estimated to be about 67 million. France has experienced a high rate of demographic growth over the last 20 years, mainly because of a relatively high birth rate, even though it has been slightly declining over the last few years.¹¹ Despite this high birth rate, one can observe the increasing share of the older population (60 year-olds and over) and the diminishing share of the youngest population (0 – 19 year-olds). At the same time, the population of 20 – 59 year-olds has steadily increased which means that there have been no labour shortages. In the last few years the rate of global unemployment has been around 10%. The increasing flow of students leaving the education system has contributed to the high rate of unemployment among the 19-25 year-old population: about 24% in 2012 (23.4 in March 2017). About 50% of 18-24 year-olds are students and only a small number of them (15%) have a part-time job while studying. The rate of unemployment of unqualified young people is three times more than the unemployment of those having a higher education qualification.¹² But the main cause of unemployment is the economic context (the low rate of economic growth) and that the supply and demand of qualifications does not match sufficiently demand in the labour market. The annual net change in the population due to migration has remained rather stable between 1990 and 2015 – about 80,000 (after a peak in 2013 of 103,000) - and has had much impact on the labour market except for increasing competition for low-qualified jobs.

Table 4: Evolution of the structure of population in France by age categories

Age	Population at January 1st				Distribution by Age Categories (%)			
	0 - 19	20 - 59	60 - 64	65 and over	0 - 19	20 - 59	60 - 64	65 and over
1995	15,650,395	31,865,820	2,960,467	8,803,895	26.4	53.7	5.0	14.9
2000	15,626,640	32,541,228	2,768,623	9,571,659	25.8	53.8	4.6	15.8
2005	15,848,857	33,901,956	2,745,892	10,233,832	25.3	54.0	4.4	16.3
2010	16,010,535	33,997,230	3,873,473	10,731,701	24.8	52.6	6.0	16.6
2014	16,172,820	33,768,386	4,092,583	11,873,197	24.5	51.3	6.2	18.0
2015	16,362,262	33,780,309	4,083,339	12,227,648	24.6	50.9	6.1	18.4

Source: INSEE

¹¹ Pison Gilles (2011) 'Deux enfants par femme dans la France de 2010 : la fécondité serait-elle insensible à la crise économique ?', *Population & Sociétés*, n° 476; Pison Gilles (2017) 'France 2016 : la natalité est en baisse', *Population & Sociétés*, n° 547.

¹² France Stratégie/DARES (2017) *L'insertion professionnelle des jeunes* (www.strategie.gouv.fr)

Foresight approaches of the demand for qualifications by employers

As it is said in a recent report of the general inspection of the Ministry of Education, 'the debates about the definition of the curriculum of VET pathways and the sharing of responsibilities between the Ministry and the representatives of employers and trade unions illustrate the difficulty to design an IVET [that sufficiently integrates] the theoretical and practical aspects of an education that would take into account the most recent technological evolutions.'¹³

As noted above, the 2014 annual survey carried out by the Directorate of Evaluation, Foresight and Performance (DEPP) of the Ministry of Education, showed that seven months after leaving school 57% of CAP graduates and 46% of Bac Pro graduates were unemployed. According to another 2013 survey carried out by the Centre of Studies and Research on Qualifications (CEREQ), three years after passing the CAP, one third of the graduates were still unemployed. This is also the case for one fifth of Bac Pro graduates. All the surveys show that obtaining a job implies often to accept a position in another economic sector or even an underqualified one. A more recent survey in 2017 confirms these findings and the fact having a recognised qualification at levels 3 or 4 has a very positive impact:¹⁴ seven months after leaving school about 50 % of qualified young people had a job against only 34% for those who were unqualified.¹⁵

Since a law in 1993, in order to improve the matching between the supply and the demand of qualifications, a process of decentralisation has considerably reinforced the power of regions for coordinating the supply of IVET and CVET. This law gave more power to the regions. In particular, each region had to design a regional VET plan for young people (under 26 year-old) - *Plan Régional de Développement des Formations Professionnelles des Jeunes, PRDFPJ* – in order to establish more consistency in the the supply of qualifications and a better matching with the current and future needs of the regional economy. Another law in 2002 extended this regional power to CVET for all adults. Then in 2004, these regional powers were extended to unemployed people and the regions must design (in concertation with the state and employer and union organisations) a medium-term plan of the supply of qualifications at regional level.

The Law of 24 November 2009 about career guidance and VET in a LLL perspective stipulates that the Regional Council must set up (in concertation with the state) common objectives that are defined in a contract of regional planning for developing VET - *Contrat de Plan Régional de Développement des Formations Professionnelles, CPRDFP* – which is designed from an analysis of the medium-term needs of the regional economy in terms of skills and competences. A new Law in 2014, while increasing the initiatives of the Regions, aims at improving the governance of VET by merging the National Council of LLL and the Higher Council of Employment into a National Council of Employment, Career Guidance and Professional Training: *Conseil National de l'Emploi, de la Formation et de l'Orientation Professionnelles, CNEFOP*. This new council is supposed to strengthen the concertation between the state, the regions, the social partners and other stakeholders¹⁶ and has a role of evaluation of the public policies in this domain.

There is, however, still a significant mismatch between the supply of qualifications and the expectations from employers. According to many experts, this is partly due to the great number of qualifications that are too specialised. Moreover, despite the process of regionalisation, the national

¹³ IGEN/IGAEN (2016) Cartographie de l'enseignement professionnel, Ministry of Education, Executive Summary.

¹⁴ DEPP (2017) Note d'Information n° 17-12, Ministry of Education.

¹⁵ Over the last 20 years the number of school-leavers without any recognised qualification has remained relatively stable around 150 000 despite many policy reforms.

¹⁶ Law n° 2014-288 (5 March 2014) and Decree of 22 August 2014.

objectives set up by the Ministry of Education are still predominant with respect to the regional expectations of employers.¹⁷

Productivity and international competitiveness challenge

Over the last 20 years, one of the main challenges has been to maintain a rate of economic growth that will reduce the high unemployment rate. The rate of growth of the GDP in the period 1995-2015 is much lower than during the after-war period (1950-1974) called the '*Trente Glorieuses*' which had an average rate of 5.7% and a very low unemployment rate. The rate of growth was 2.1% in 1995, 3.9% in 2000 (peak), 1.6% in 2005, - 2.9% (depression) in 2009, 2.0 % in 2010, and 1.3% in 2015. Economists usually estimate that a rate of about 2% is required to reduce the unemployment rate.

In the context of globalisation, the rate of growth increasingly depends on the competitiveness of the economy which in turn depends on many factors including the investment in financial and human capital, i.e. the level of qualification of the labour force and the importance of research and development. One of the consequences of the search for improved productivity is the investment in computers, information networks, automatised production processes and robots, which have an impact on the structure of qualifications needed by enterprises: they require more highly qualified jobs, while at the same time requiring low-qualified jobs, and have an uncertain impact on other jobs depending on the economic sector.

The competitiveness of the French economy has declined from the 1990s and the public struggle against unemployment has mainly focussed on increasing the employment of low-qualified people and later on an objective of sharing employment related to the decrease of working time (law establishing the 35 hours per week). In this context, the decreasing productivity was seen by some authors and by the public opinion as a factor likely to reduce unemployment.¹⁸ But the negative impact of this policy on the rate of economic growth and on the possibility to finance increasing health and social expenditures led the government stopping the policy about 10 last years ago.

Financing of VET

At a macroeconomic level, the total national expenditure for education is estimated at about 148 billion euros, which accounts for 6.8% of GDP. International comparisons regard only the percentage of GDP of the initial education spending: France is just above the average of OECD countries (5.3 % against 5.2%)¹⁹. Initial VET (like initial education in general) is essentially financed by the State and the local authorities (mainly the regions), and to a lesser extent by enterprises and households.

In 2015, CVET expenditure was estimated at 14.3 billion EUR by the National Education Accounts which do not take into account as many types of expenditure as the Ministry of Labour. These expenditures are financed by enterprises (51.2%), Regions and other local authorities (21%), Ministries (11.6%) and households (6.2%).

¹⁷ Buisson-Fenet H., Gardon S. & Verdier E. (2011) 'L'État contre ou avec le territoire ? La formation professionnelle et universitaire en tension entre logiques centrales et volonté d'action des régions'. In IEP Strasbourg. Congrès de l'Association française de science politique, Strasbourg; Buisson-Fenet Hélène & Verdier Éric (2011). « Une régionalisation impossible ? La régulation des formations professionnelles initiales en France : concurrences institutionnelles et hiérarchie d'instruments statistiques ». Sociologie et sociétés, vol. 43, n° 2, p. 41-65.

¹⁸ France stratégie (2016) Comprendre le ralentissement de la productivité en France – Note d'Analyse n° 38.

¹⁹ DEPP (2016) L'état de l'Ecole, Ministry of Education.

Since a law of 1971, enterprises have an obligation to finance training sessions for their employees. Their contribution has steadily increased and in 2013 their financing of adult education was much higher than the legal obligation as they devoted 2.65% of their payrolls to adult education instead of only 1.35% in 1972. Over the last 40 years the number of employees involved in training has increased fourfold: 42.4% in 2014 against 11% in 1972. Participation, however, varies a lot according to the level of qualification of the employee and the size of the enterprise. For example, in 2013, nearly 60% of the engineers or technicians participated in a training session, but only 32% of the workforce in general. This proportion depends also on the size of the enterprise: for example, in 2013, 16.5% within enterprises with 10 to 19 employees (which spent 1.3% of their payroll on training) and more than 50% in enterprises of more than 2,000 employees (which spent 3.7% of their payroll).

There is a very high number of training providers of CVET. In 2013, according to the Ministry of Labour's statistics, there were 66,400 operators, 21,000 of which as a principal activity and 45,400 enterprises having developed training as a secondary activity. Just between 2007 and 2013, their number increased by 43% in a rather stagnant market. Such an evolution had the consequence of reducing the sales revenue of the majority of these training bodies, thus increasing their vulnerability. This vulnerability could still be increased by the development of the digital devices and new distance learning processes which can use economies of scale. The technological evolution should facilitate a concentration of the supply among fewer operators. The main actors of the ministry of education – universities, IUT and networks of secondary schools (called GRETAs²⁰) – will participate in this new technological trend of digital CVET, with other partners, particularly with AFPA.²¹

The growing influence of the European Union

One also should mention the increasing influence of the European Union. Examples include the adoption of an NFQ taking into account the European Qualification Framework (EQF) and increasing efforts to increase the transparency of vocational qualifications in order to facilitate geographical and professional mobility throughout Europe and beyond. Moreover, France adopted approaches in terms of formulating learning outcomes at all levels of IVET and CVET, which increasingly makes general reference to the LLL paradigm, applies quality assurance devices and procedures, develops schools 'of second chance' for young adults who left school without any qualifications, and implements core key competences for compulsory education.²²

6. Conclusion

The main differences of the present French VET system with respect to the early 1990s relates to the following:

- the development of the vocational baccalauréat (bac pro)
- the *BEP* (Brevet d'Etudes Professionnelles) is not anymore a degree, it is just an intermediary qualification for the students preparing a vocational baccalauréat ('*bac pro*') at level EQF4;
- the development of recognition/validation of informally acquired competences;
- the possibility through apprenticeship to acquire qualifications at levels 4, 5, 6 and 7; and

²⁰ GRETAs: Groupements d'établissements (secondaires) pour la formation continue des adultes

²¹ AFPA: Agence Française de Formation Professionnelle des Adultes: national agency under the tutorship of the Ministry of Labour, which is through its network, the first provider of adult training in France.

²² Halasz Gabor & Michel Alain (2011) 'Key Competences in Europe: Interpretation, policy formulation and implementation', *European Journal of Education*, vol. 46 (3).

- the laws of 1993 and 2009 giving major powers to the regions in the field of VET.

Over the past 20 years, the main successes and main failures of VET policy have been:

- the steady development of bac pro and its relatively good perception by employers in some specialities;
- a better prestige and an increasing attractiveness of the bac pro after the reform allowing to pass this exam after three years the same as for the other types of baccalauréat;
- the creation of the *licence professionnelle* (vocational Bachelor) after 3 years of higher education;
- the creation of professional masters (after five years of higher education).

It appears that the most important feature of the evolution of VET over the last 30 years is an increasing level of the average level of qualification of the population (students and manpower)

The main challenges that face the VET system and its capacity to cope with them are as follows:

- the relatively negative image of upper secondary VET despite all the efforts of successive governments to improve this image;
- for certain specialities the assessment standards are deemed too general and as not sufficiently taking into account the competences required by the real responsibilities and tasks of the jobs they are supposed to prepare for;
- the large diversity of qualifications does not lead to a satisfactory quantitative and qualitative entrance to the labour market and does not meet the expectations of employers, even in some traditional economic sectors like building, public works, tourism, etc.;
- this weakness of the VET system is illustrated by the coexistence of a shortage of people with certain qualifications in some economic sectors while the number of students registered in some other qualifications is exceeding their demand in the labour market; and
- a lack of foresight studies integrating at regional levels the dynamic interaction between supply and demand of qualifications beyond a simple short term vision adequate VET qualifications.

Another contradiction is not easy to solve: in order to take into account the expectations in terms of general knowledge and transversal competences, the syllabus of the *Bac Pro* (the first objective of which is an insertion of the labour market) has increased the share of general academic subjects but this has also been an incentive to pursue studies. Consequently there is a shortage of *Bac Pro* graduates in certain economic sectors. But, overall, all reforms of VET since 30 years have been based more on an educational rationale rather than on a really vocational one, partly because of the great diversity of expectations from employers. In particular, there is a large difference between the big companies which prefer more transversal competences and thus appreciate the *Bac Pro* (EQF4) and the small and medium size enterprises which prefer practical know how and more specialised skills and thus rather welcome the *CAP* and qualifications at level EQF3

Increasing the competitiveness of the economy implies a general effort of education in a lifelong learning perspective and particularly an improvement of VET to meet the new needs in terms of competences and providing soft transversal skills.

VET in France includes several sub-systems which have broad common goals in the development of lifelong learning but different operational objectives and different organisational structures. Even

within IVET at upper secondary level there are two different pathways: mainly school-based learning delivered in lycées professionnels, and mainly workplace-based through apprenticeships. While the Ministry of Education and the Regions play a major role in IVET, other ministries, the chambers of trade and industry and other chambers, as well as private enterprises also play a major role in CVET. One important challenge for the future will be to improve basic transversal competences and soft skills through IVET and CVET in order to better prepare students and adults for a fast changing society and increasing economic competition requiring more professional and geographical mobility.

As for IVET, the vocational lycée (LP) is facing three main challenges: (i) reducing absenteeism and early-leaving is a central priority; (ii) the renewal of pedagogy requires an effort to improve initial and continuous training of teaching staff; and (iii) the articulation between the education provided in LP and apprenticeships should be improved through more exchanges between LP and CFA, allowing for apprenticeships for students in LP.²³

As Paul Santelmann underlined recently²⁴, VET must be perceived as a complementarity between three processes: basic IVET, informal skills acquired during the whole life, and training sessions at crucial junctures in a person's working life. The role of the enterprises is important. They must become involved with VET in particular in order to optimise CVET. To a large extent, the effectiveness of VET depends on a balanced integration of formal training, informal learning at work and certification of acquired skills and competences. Such a culture finds new processes in some start-ups where new employees recruited and apprentices are well integrated in a perspective of sharing know-how and practical knowledge among the whole staff. Another evolution can be observed within big companies that create their own campus taking advantage of the working experiences of their staff.

Last but not least, one major challenge is to develop and improve the recognition of prior learning and informally acquired competences. In France a complete required legal framework exists, procedures and financing resources are available, but despite some progress there are still issues to be solved both for the least qualified people (too complex procedures) and for higher education qualifications (resistance of some teaching staff reluctant to deliver a degree based mainly on experience and practical skills).²⁵

²³ Jellab Aziz (2014) *L'émancipation scolaire : Pour un lycée professionnel de la réussite*. Toulouse : Presses universitaires du Mirail.

²⁴ Santelmann P. (2017) Newsletter AFPA, June 2017. Paul Santelmann is the Director of foresight of AFPA (the first provider of CVET in France).

²⁵ Michel Alain & Looney Janet (2015) *Certification of Informally Acquired Competences in France*, Bertelsmann Foundation.