



Country report

France

2016 update to the European inventory
on validation of non-formal and informal learning

Author: Cécile Mathou

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1 Introduction and evaluation

1.1 Abstract

VAE has been a major breakthrough in the validation and certification system in France since 2002. It is a procedure that can lead to the award of whole or parts of qualifications with a vocational and professional orientation and purpose (*finalité professionnelle*) at all levels, without the need to go through formal training. Qualifications obtained through VAE is the same as those awarded via initial or continuous formal training or apprenticeship. VAE includes, by definition, the stages of identification, documentation, assessment and certification. The development of VAE was simultaneous to the restructuring of the certification system in France, with the introduction of a unique national directory of vocational qualifications (RNCP). Any qualification to be obtained via VAE must be registered in the RNCP. VAE has developed from a national perspective, strongly articulated to lifelong learning, training and employment policies. It is now integrated in the Labour and Education code. Since 2013, looking at qualifications awarded by Ministries, more than 307 000 full qualifications have been awarded through VAE, and today, about 1 300 qualifications are accessible through VAE.

In comparison with systems for validation of non-formal and informal learning in place in other European countries, the French VAE system is very well developed. However, efforts to broaden access, diversify the profile of candidates, shorten the length of the process and encourage its use across a wider range of qualifications are still required for further development of the system. VAE remains a demanding procedure, especially for candidates with low skills and low levels of qualifications, although surveys show that these candidates recognise that a diploma cannot be awarded as a single certificate; it still poses important challenges to training providers responsible for its implementation. Barriers and difficulties are well identified by public authorities, for instance, in reports published by the General Inspectorates. Moreover, recent revisions of the legislative framework (Law of 5 March 2014) introduced important changes which are expected to have a positive impact on the take-up of VAE. It should provide better support to candidates, smoothen the procedures, improve coordination between stakeholders, and finally, improve data monitoring.

This French report mainly deals with VAE, which means validation of informal learning leading to certification. Many other forms of validation exist in France, for example the system of “commissions d'équivalence” which enables people who do not possess the requisite qualification to go through competitive exams leading to public jobs. One also has to keep in mind that most of the vocational continuing training programmes leading to national qualifications are not considered as including validation although they often assume exemption of the requisite diploma or of part of the programme.

1.2 Main changes since the 2014 update

Since the 2014 update, changes were introduced to the legislative framework governing vocational training. The Law adopted on 5 March 2014¹ (followed by a Decree in the same year) introduced a number of important changes that are expected to affect VAE and to have positive implications for its development. In particular, it broadens access to VAE for individuals who do not have a qualification level equivalent to level V (EQF level 3) (certain training periods undertaken in the workplace, for example companies or associations, can be taken into account in the calculation of their years of experience) and simplifies access to

¹ Loi no 2014-288 du 5 mars 2014 relative à la formation professionnelle, à l'emploi et à la démocratie sociale: <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000028683576>

Décret no 2014-1354 du 12 novembre 2014 portant diverses mesures relatives à la validation des acquis de l'expérience : <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/eli/decret/2014/11/12/ETSD1417561D/jo>

VAE for employees with temporary contracts (CDD). The law also introduces an obligation for companies to carry out interviews every two years with their employees to review their professional development and inform them about the VAE.

The Law introduced the creation of a personal training account (compte personnel de formation) which allows individuals to finance their own training and to register with parts of a system of training pathways (see section 2.2.).

The possibility for candidates to have access to **support** (*accompagnement*) is formally recognised and emphasised in the new law. The law also clarified the role of various stakeholders (involved in support, eligibility checks, organisation of assessments). Finally, the law includes provision concerning the organisation of the statistical **monitoring** of VAE pathways, to provide better knowledge of VAE-related activities and of candidates' pathways, and to inform the steering of the VAE mechanism.

State of play of validation in France

In France, the procedure known as Validation of experience (Validation des acquis de l'expérience - VAE) can lead to the award of whole or parts of a qualification – with a vocational and professional orientation and purpose (*finalité professionnelle*) – based on the knowledge and skills acquired through prior experience and learning in a variety of contexts. Qualifications which can be obtained via the VAE procedure are registered in the national qualification directory (RNCP) which covers levels 3 to 8 of the EQF². RNCP covers all vocationally or professionally oriented qualifications, including all higher education qualifications with a vocational and professional orientation and purpose (Cedefop, 2015).

In addition to vocational qualifications awarded by Ministries, sectoral vocational qualifications recognised by social partners such as *Certificats de Qualification Professionnelle* (CQP) and listed in the RNCP can also be awarded through VAE.

France can be considered as a leading country in terms of validation. VAE has now been in place for 15 years. It is an integrated system, connected to the national qualification framework. The procedure is defined by law and decrees, ensuring consistency across sectors. Qualifications awarded through VAE have exactly the same value as those awarded through participation in formal VET.

VAE is an individual right (which is closely connected to the individual right to continuous vocational training); in order to qualify, individuals must have at least three years of experience in a certain field relevant to the field of the qualification they want to obtain. The validation procedure includes all stages of validation (identification/document, assessment, certification by jury).

In terms of institutional design, VAE was positioned at the crossroads of training and employment, although in terms of the funding it receives, funding is earmarked for continuing vocational training. It has developed from a national perspective, a key milestone being the adoption of legislation in 2002, defining the legal framework for validation of prior experience. It is an important component of vocational training and labour market policies. In addition, the 2009 Law on Guidance and Lifelong Learning sets out that VAE must be part of negotiations between the social partners in each sector. The general institutional framework for VAE is under the responsibility of the Ministry in charge of employment. It has played a key coordinating role to implement this new system on the ground, in partnership with regional councils and the other Ministries awarding qualifications. The VAE system grew rapidly from a quantitative point of view in the first years of its implementation. Nowadays, there are around 1 300 qualifications accessible via VAE (not including higher education qualifications). Looking at the qualifications awarded by Ministries (*ministères certificateurs*), since the beginning of the implementation of VAE, **a total number of circa 307 400**

² See Section 2.2. for further details on RNCP.

qualifications (full validation) were awarded between 2003 and 2014 (DARES data, in Ministère des finances, 2015). With respect to all types of qualifications, there are around 57 000 annual requests for validation examined by juries, and about half concern qualifications awarded by the Ministry of education and the Ministry of higher education (IGEN-IGAENR, 2015).

However, VAE remains marginal compared to the awarding of diplomas obtained through initial training. VAE still represents a marginal share of the vocational diplomas awarded by the Ministry of education and of higher education and research. For example, in 2014, VAE represented less than 2 % of all CAP awarded. Overall, 3 % of university diplomas are awarded through VAE. This share is also decreasing, especially for qualifications awarded by the Ministry of employment.

Applications remain concentrated on a small number of qualifications, mostly in the health and social sector. In 2014, three-quarters of the applications for vocational and technical diplomas awarded by the Ministry of employment covered 5 % of the total number of qualifications accessible through VAE. In the past five years, a slight but steady decrease in the number of the applicants has been observed across all Ministries (between 3 and 10 %).

VAE remains a demanding and sometimes lengthy procedure for candidates, especially for candidates with low skills and low levels of qualifications. Delays before candidates can present their case in front of a jury are generally deemed excessive, in particular for qualifications pertaining to public certification bodies (except qualifications awarded by the Ministry of employment).

In the higher education sector for instance, the initial rapid growth was followed by stagnation, as of 2007. Beneficiaries are mostly people who are active on the labour market, with almost half of candidates holding managerial positions (*cadres*). On average, validation in this sector takes 6 to 9 months to conclude (Source: Ministry of education). Therefore, VAE remains a demanding process, in terms of time and effort, leading to dropouts before applications can be assessed (Doucet, 2015); it can also lead to partial validation, which is often perceived negatively by candidates. VAE also requires not only the capacity to show evidence of previous experience (putting together evidence material), but also the capacity to reflect on past experiences and verbalise this reflection and analysis (requiring good proficiency in oral and written expression). This can be particularly challenging for certain groups of candidates who would benefit from VAE, especially individuals with low levels of qualifications (this does not apply to HE where candidates very rarely have low levels of qualifications). This makes the “*accompagnement*” or support of candidates even more crucial (Doucet, 2015). The Ministry of higher education has adopted a roadmap (based on recommendations made by the IGAENR, 2014), to address a number of barriers identified in this sector, as part of a broader strategy to strengthen lifelong learning in universities.

VAE also raises a number of issues for training and certification actors: it separates training and certification processes, while traditionally certification is closely linked to assessment carried out in relation to training processes. It also has organisational consequences, in terms of timing for instance, which is based on the progress made by candidates in their preparation of the VAE application file, not on the timeframe imposed by the education institution. Flows of candidates are not regulated by the number of available places in the training system, but are entirely regulated by the demand; this makes planning and forecasting almost impossible (IGEN-IGAENR, 2015). Finally, in HE, involvement in VAE juries is not valued in academic careers, in the current setting which focuses primarily on research.

A report recently presented at the *Assemblée Nationale* (Doucet, 2015) pointed at certain limits of VAE while also highlighting its strength and robustness. The fact that VAE is strongly focused on certification (with its strong connection with the RNCP, the qualification directory) is considered to be a strength of the system. On the other hand, VAE was not designed to evaluate time spent in initial training, periods of in-company traineeships, or dual

training periods. This is an issue for certain groups such as early school leavers or people with low levels of qualifications.

For individuals who dropped out of school without a qualification and wish to return to education and training, VAE does not allow the possibility to recognise the competences they acquired during initial training. Such recognition would require regulatory changes, in order to open VAE to other forms of acquisition of competences, including “hybrid pathways” combining initial training, professional experience and continuous training (IGEN-IGAENR, 2015).

The emphasis on support provided to eligible candidates and the clarification of responsibilities between stakeholders should ensure that more candidates go through the whole process. The law of 5 March 2014 designates the bodies responsible for organising data collection on candidates’ pathways (obtained through a monitoring system, to be created). It should feed into future decisions concerning further developments of VAE. Finally, the law created new governing bodies for vocational training at national and regional level (CREFOP and CNEFOP) bringing together the state, the regions and social partners. It is not yet clear to what extent this will improve the coordination between all stakeholders in charge of VAE; this remains to be seen.

2 National perspective

2.1 Overarching approach to validation

In France, the system of validation of non-formal and informal learning builds upon longstanding practices in the field of identification and recognition of prior learning and professional experience. The validation system, which is based on a clear legal framework, has taken shape in the framework of vocational training and labour market policies. Its legal base lies in the 6th part of the Labour code (book IV) dedicated to vocational training; it is evenly addressing initial training (book II) and continuous vocational training (book III). Its purpose is to give the opportunity to those who have no qualifications in connection with the activities they have undertaken to obtain a level of qualification corresponding to their skills.

A key milestone was the adoption of legislation in 2002, followed by various decrees, which created the current procedure known as Validation of experience (*Validation des acquis de l'expérience* - VAE)³. VAE can lead to the award of whole or parts of a qualification (*certification*) based on the knowledge and skills acquired through prior experience and learning in a variety of contexts.

³ Loi de modernisation sociale 2002-73 du 17 janvier 2002 (Journal officiel du 18 janvier 2002)

Loi de modernisation de la fonction publique 2007-148 du 2 février 2007 (Journal officiel du 6 février 2007)

Décret 2007-1470 du 15 octobre 2007 relative à la formation professionnelle tout au long de la vie des fonctionnaires de l'Etat

Décret 2002-1459 du 16 décembre 2002 relatif à la prise en charge par les employeurs des actions de validation des acquis de l'expérience et portant modification du titre V du livre IX du Code du travail (deuxième partie : Décrets en Conseil d'Etat)

Décret 2002-1460 du 16 décembre 2002 relatif au contrôle des organismes qui assistent des candidats à une validation des acquis de l'expérience et modifiant le titre IX du livre IX du code du travail (deuxième partie : Décrets en Conseil d'Etat)

Circulaire n°2003-127 du 01-08-2003 sur l'organisation de la validation des acquis de l'expérience (BO n°32 du 4 septembre 2003)

References in the Education code : Articles L 335-5 et suivants, Article L 331-1, Articles L 613-3 et suivants, Articles L 641-2) and Labour Code : Article L6111-1 (VD), Article L6311-1, Article L6411-1 (VD), Article L6422-1 (VD), Article L6422-10 (VD), Article L6421-1 (VD), Article L6421-2 (VD), Article L6421-3 (VD), Article L6421-4 (VD), Article L6412-1, Article R6422-11 (V), Article R6422-12, Article R6422-13 (V)

VAE is defined as an individual right in France. Employees can use their individual right to training leave to undertake a VAE.

In practice, one or more employers can implement, at their own initiative or on the suggestion of their professional branch or of decentralised services of the State, collective VAE projects for the benefit of a group of workers. These collective projects can be implemented also for job seekers. In the latter case, they will be at the job centre initiative or decentralised services of the State; however, their applications are always assessed on an individual basis.

In order to qualify, individuals must have at least three years of experience in a certain field relevant to the field of the qualification they want to obtain. VAE can be organised for a wide range of qualifications, not only those awarded or accredited by Ministries (vocationally or professionally oriented qualifications, including all higher education qualifications with a vocational and professional orientation and purpose) but also sectoral qualifications recognised by social partners such as *Certificats de Qualification Professionnelle* (CQP) and others qualifications created by training organisations. **Any qualification officially recognised by the State and the social partners and listed in the national directory of qualifications, the *Répertoire National des Certifications Professionnelles* (RNCP) – except when it is linked to a ‘regulated profession’ (where activity made without the corresponding qualification is illegal) – can be awarded through a VAE procedure.** The qualifications awarded through VAE are exactly the same and have exactly same value as those awarded through participation in formal education and training.

It should be noted that in addition to VAE, other procedures linked to the assessment of informal learning and non-formal learning exist:

- There is a mechanism for the recognition of professional and personal experience to grant access to a programme through exemption of the normal requirements; at higher education level, this procedure known as Validation des acquis professionnels et personnels (VAPP, initially “VAP 85”) was introduced in 1985⁴ and is still in place as of today;
- The skill audits or *bilan de compétences* (see Section 2.3) aims at the identification of skills and competences acquired by an individual through his/her professional pathway, without targeting a particular certification and without an assessment procedure. It is not in itself a validation procedure, the *Bilan de compétences* can still be the starting point of a validation process.
- Other types of competence portfolios developed outside of validation procedures also exist (not described in detail in this report).

While the legal framework on VAE sets general parameters of the procedure, in practice the implementation of specific rules is under the responsibility of each authority awarding qualifications listed in the RNCP. This includes different Ministries (Ministries in charge of national education, higher education, agriculture, labour, culture, sports and youth, social affairs, health, defence), chambers of commerce, and chambers of trade and private training providers. Actual assessment procedures differ depending on the type of qualification targeted by the application and awarding authority.

Changes have been made to the legislative framework since the 2014 update.

The Law adopted on the 5 March 2014⁵ (followed by a Decree the same year) introduced a number of important changes that will affect VAE:

⁴ Décret n° 85-906 du 23 août 1985

⁵ Loi no 2014-288 du 5 mars 2014 relative à la formation professionnelle, à l'emploi et à la démocratie sociale: <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000028683576>

- It broadens **access** to VAE to individuals who do not have a qualification level equivalent to level V (EQF level 3). It provides these individuals with the option to include, in the calculation of the duration of their experience, certain training periods undertaken in a work context, based on the principle of the recognition of all forms of learning (formal, informal and non-formal). Access to training leave for undertaking validation is made easier for employees with temporary contracts (CDD).
- It introduces a new mechanism for the financing of vocational continuing training and then for VAE with an individual training account attached to the individual until retirement age. It also creates an obligation for companies to carry out interviews every two years with their employees to review their professional development and inform them about VAE.
- The law emphasises the possibility for candidates to have access to **support** (*accompagnement*). The scope and methods of such support are defined in the decree of 14 November 2014. Such support, considered as a factor increasing the chances of success of the candidate, was not formally identified in the previous legal provisions. It clarifies the role of stakeholders involved in VAE: the review of the admission of applications and the organisation of the assessment depend of each authority awarding qualifications, the support (*accompagnement*) for post-admission is organised by the region for job seekers and by the joint registered collection bodies (OPCA) for employees.
- In addition, it clarifies VAE procedures by formally introducing a stage for prior examination of the **eligibility** of applications. This eligibility check was already carried out in practice to verify the length of the candidates' experiences and the relevance of the activities carried out in relation to the targeted qualification.
- Finally, the law includes provisions concerning the organisation of statistical **monitoring** of VAE pathways, by the governing bodies in the area of employment, professional training and guidance, at regional and national level (see Section 5). The aim is to improve, on the one hand, the transparency of VAE-related activities; on the other hand, the goal is to obtain data on candidates' pathways in order to better inform the steering of the VAE mechanism.

2.2 Validation in education and training

The French validation system is well-developed and based on a legal framework. VAE candidates can obtain a whole qualification (*certification*), based on the knowledge and skills acquired through prior experience and learning in a variety of contexts.

In cases when candidates validate “parts” of a qualification (“partial” validation), the candidate has 5 years to acquire further experience (e.g. through training, traineeships) before re-submitting an application.⁶ In concrete terms, partial validation means that the qualification awarding body delivers a document taking stock of the learning units validated by the candidate. It can take the form of a booklet comprising competence certificates or specialisation certificates (which represent units constituting the whole qualification). Individuals who obtained partial validation through a VAE procedure, can now use their

Décret no 2014-1354 du 12 novembre 2014 portant diverses mesures relatives à la validation des acquis de l'expérience : <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/eli/decret/2014/11/12/ETSD1417561D/jo>

⁶ When engaging in a validation process however, the candidate always files an application targeting a whole qualification. In case of “partial validation” following assessment by a jury, the candidate has 5 years to validate the diploma. Complementary professional experiences, such as training, stages, can be undertaken to enrich the candidate's experience, before re-submitting an application. The jury makes recommendations regarding the type of activities that can be undertaken to fulfil the qualification standards' requirements (Art. R335-9 du Code de l'éducation). Details are available at : <http://www.vae.gouv.fr/espace-ressources/fiches-outil/l-etape-post-jury-vae.html>

personal training account (created by the Law of 5 March 2014) to obtain the missing competences through training.

Qualifications awarded through VAE have exactly the same value as those awarded through participation in formal education and training.

VAE processes include the four stages of validation: identification, documentation, assessment and certification. The process includes a first step (called “Livret 1”) which consists of an initial review of the eligibility of applications (based on legal requirements) and it gathers evidence of at least three years of experience in a field related to the qualification targeted. Once the “Livret 1” is declared admissible, the documentation phase can start: the candidate will elaborate a portfolio (“Livret 2”) to demonstrate that he/she possesses the necessary competencies required for the targeted qualification. During this phase, the provision of support is now officially recognised since 2014 (Decree 12 November 2014). This portfolio (“Livret 2”) is then assessed by a jury, leading (or not) to certification.

An experimentation is underway to test the possibility of accepting candidates for VAE, when maximum one of the typical activities listed in the qualification standards is missing from their experience. They would receive, just after notification of the acceptance of the application, additional training to fill this lack of experience.

VAE can be organised for any vocationally or professionally oriented qualification – including a higher education qualification – officially listed in the national directory of qualifications, the *Répertoire National des Certifications Professionnelles* (RNCP). This national qualifications framework is managed by the National Commission Qualifications (CNCQ). It classifies professional qualifications (*certifications*) into five levels (with the exception of CQP⁷) based on National classification of levels of training (1969).

Table 2.1 Equivalence between 1969 qualification framework and European Qualification Framework

Nomenclature 1969		Levels EQF
Level I	Staff with a middle management job that normally requires training above the first-year Master's degree level. In addition to the strong knowledge of scientific basis of the job, a level I requires knowledge of process design and research.	8 and 7
Level II	Staff with a middle management job that normally requires a training of a Bachelor's degree level or a first-year Master's degree level. At this level, the practice of an employment contract or independent means knowing the scientific foundations of the job, generally leading to autonomy in carrying out this activity.	6
Level III	Staff with a job that normally requires a <i>Diplôme universitaire de technologie</i> (DUT) or a <i>Brevet de technicien supérieur</i> (BTS) or end of undergraduate higher education. A degree of Level III corresponds to the knowledge and skills level, though lacking the knowledge of the scientific basis of the areas concerned. Capabilities and knowledge required needs to ensure ability to work autonomously or independently with responsibilities of design and/or coaching and/or management.	5
Level IV	Staff with a jobs of control or highly skilled worker and can attest to a level of training equivalent to that of the <i>brevet professionnel</i> (BP), the <i>brevet de technicien</i> (BT), a <i>Baccalauréat professionnel</i> or a <i>Baccalauréat technologique</i> . A degree of level IV requires more theoretical knowledge than the previous level. This activity involves chiefly technical work which can be performed independently and/or entail executive coaching (control).	4
Level V	Staff with a job normally requiring a level of training equivalent to the <i>brevet d'études professionnelles</i> (BEP) or the <i>certificat d'aptitude</i>	3

⁷ Sectoral vocational qualifications recognised by social partners such as Certificats de Qualification Professionnelle (CQP)

<p><i>professionnelle</i> (CAP), and by equivalence, of the <i>certificat de formation professionnelle des adultes</i> (CFPA). This level corresponds to a full qualification for the practice of a specific activity, with the ability to use instruments and techniques relating thereto. This activity involves chiefly the performance of a work which may be independently conducted within the limits of the techniques related thereto.</p>	
Without object	2
Without object	1

All vocationally-oriented qualifications awarded by French ministries and developed in cooperation with consultative bodies, including social partners (via specific Committees depending on the Ministry)⁸ are automatically registered in the RNCP directory⁹. Since 2009, the commission in charge of RNCP issues an opinion (publicly available) on the relevance of the development of new qualifications.

Other qualifications, including higher education¹⁰ qualifications and sectoral vocational certificates (*Certificats de qualification professionnelle*, CQP), are registered in the RNCP on the basis of a request submitted to the CNCPC.

With the exception of specific cases defined by law or regulations, all qualifications registered in the RNCP are opened to VAE. Such qualifications may include certificates that can be obtained through continuous vocational training (e.g. certificates awarded by Chambers of commerce, by the Ministry of Employment) if they are registered in the RNCP. However, many certificates available through continuous training are not registered in the RNCP.

The French VAE system is well developed based on robust procedures and a strong legal basis. However, efforts are still needed to broaden access, diversify the profile of candidates, improve the transparency of procedures implemented by each awarding authority, shorten its length and encourage its use across a wider range of qualifications (See Section 9.4).

VAE and OER (Open Educational Resources)

No specific information is available on the link between validation (VAE) and OER.

The VAE procedure does not aim to facilitate the validation of learning outcomes from OER. It is not possible to apply for VAE solely on the basis of learning outcomes from OER. VAE focuses on the validation of learning outcomes from professional experience, including volunteer work; a relevant experience of at least three years is required to apply for validation.

OER such as MOOCs could be taken into account in the validation of higher education studies (*validation des études supérieures* - VES)¹¹ – which is not part of VAE, nor of

⁸ CPC (Commission professionnelle consultative) for the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Vocational Training and Social Dialogue and the Ministry of Education; CNESER (Conseil national de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche) for the Ministry of Higher Education.

⁹ For more information on the French NQF, see European Inventory on NQF 2012: The French NQF, as defined by the RNCP, covers vocationally or professionally oriented qualifications, including higher education qualifications as they have a vocational and professional purpose. The framework covers three main types of qualification: those awarded by French ministries (in cooperation with the social partners through a CPC); those awarded by training providers, chambers and ministries but where no CPC is in place; those set up and awarded by social partners under their own responsibility.

¹⁰ Universities award both State diplomas (can be automatically registered in the RNCP if it fulfils the criteria such as presence of CNESER) and "university diplomas", which are not automatically in the RNCP; a request must be made to have a diploma registered, it needs to fulfil a number of criteria.

¹¹ Another type of validation procedure in place in the higher education sector - not linked to non-formal and informal learning - is the "validation of higher education studies" - VES e.g. for studies carried abroad. Instead of evaluating the professional experience, this procedure takes into account the prior studies followed and the

VAPP¹² – whereby previous studies and obtained diplomas are taken into account in obtaining directly a whole/part of a diploma. There is no data available on VES (source: Ministry of higher education).

They could as well be taken into account in gaining access to a programme through the “VAPP 85” procedure.

2.3 Validation and the labour market

2.3.1 Skills audits

Skills audits (*bilans de competences*) are a well-developed tool in France. This tool is used mostly for workers, but also for jobseekers. Its objective is to allow individuals to identify and analyse their professional and personal competencies, their aptitudes and motivation, with a view to define a professional project or training project. A skills audit is personalised and is not related to a specific qualification or standard.

According to the Labour Code (Article R6322-35 and further revisions):

- A skills audit can be requested by an employee or by his/her employer, but cannot in any case be imposed on any individual. It is assimilated to a training activity and can be requested as part of the individual right to training and training leave.
- The skills audit must be carried out by an external accredited provider and include a preliminary phase, an investigation phase, and a conclusion phase. The procedure must last at least 24 hours in total, including 10 hours of face-to-face interviews taking place over a period of three weeks to three months.
- The skills audit results in a synthesis document drawn up by the professional counsellor. This document is confidential and only provided to the worker who is the object of the skills audit, unless this person agrees to communicate it to another party. This document summarises the competencies and aptitudes which have been identified and how these relate to the objectives of the candidate, and includes one to three proposals for career evolution, as well as an action plan. Advice is given on necessary steps to reach the objectives in question.

In practice, professionals in charge of performing skills audit are often also trained to provide guidance on VAE procedures and support to candidates.

The skill audit can be a tool to undertake a VAE but it does not have the objective to recognise or validate learning outcomes; it does not therefore lead to the award of a qualification. The approach is ‘formative’: it aims at identifying the strong and weak points of an individual’s professional profile (Doucet, 2015).

2.4 Validation and the third sector

There are no separate validation systems in the third sector.

3 Links to national qualification systems

Qualifications and qualifications frameworks

In France, recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is directly linked to formal qualifications, as VAE specifically aims at the award of an official formal qualification (*certification*) with a vocational or professional orientation.

qualifications the person has obtained in order to deliver a partial or full qualification. To date, there is no data available for this type of validation. See: <http://www.vae.gouv.fr/validation-des-etudes-superieures>

¹² For more information on VAPP, see: <http://www.vae.gouv.fr/validation-des-acquis>

The National Vocational Qualifications Directory or RNCP, which was established by law in 2002, is the basis for the French National Qualification Framework (NQF). The aim of the RNCP is to ensure quality and transparency of formal qualifications in France, by establishing a publicly accessible register of qualifications formally recognised by the State and social partners. The RNCP is overseen by a national commission, the *Commission Nationale de la Certification professionnelle* (CNCP).¹³

The RNCP and the VAE are interdependent: a VAE procedure can be organised for all qualifications registered in the RNCP, except when a qualification is linked to a 'regulated profession' (where activity made without the corresponding qualification is illegal). Recently, the possibility to use VAE has also been introduced for qualifications in the field of accounting and management¹⁴.

Qualification awarding bodies which registered their qualifications in the RNCP must now provide a clear presentation of the blocks of competences (*blocs de compétences*) corresponding to the different parts of a qualification. The value of having qualifications divided into blocks of competences corresponding to typical activities is to modularise the training provision leading to a qualification, and allow flexibility in the management of individuals' pathways, whether through training or VAE.

As explained in Section 2.2., when engaging in a validation process, the candidate always files an application targeting a whole qualification. However the procedure can result in partial validation, meaning that the qualification awarding body delivers a document taking stock of the learning units validated by the candidate.¹⁵

In Higher Education, the credit system for formal learning is implemented through the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). VAE follows this structure for the diplomas or degrees concerned.

Table 3.1 Post secondary qualifications, their position in the NQF, EQF and corresponding ECTS

Number of years after "baccalauréat"	French diploma	Level (French framework)	Level – European Framework (EQF)	ECTS
Bac+8	Doctorat	Level I	8	
Bac +5	Master	Level I	7	300
Bac+3	Licence	Level II	6	180
Bac+2	BTS et DUT	Level III	5	120
Bac	Baccalauréat général, technologique ou professionnel	Level IV	4	

4 Standards

The RNCP describes the content of each qualification. The standards or *référentiels de certification* describe skills, knowledge and know-how and are defined in relation to

¹³ The RNCP was created in 2002, with a focus on vocationally or professionally oriented qualifications. It is only since 2010 that the RNCP became the framework for the French NQF. But the RNCP only includes qualifications from level 3 to level 8; there are no qualifications corresponding to EQF level 1 and 2. It does not include certain qualifications from general education, notably primary and lower secondary education. In addition, it does not include general upper secondary qualifications (the General Baccalaureate). It is defined by its labour market focus (Cedefop, 2015).

¹⁴ As of 2011, for the DCG et DSCG (décret n° 2006-1706 du 22 déc. 2006), being implemented for DEC (décret n° 2009-1789 du 30 déc. 2009).

¹⁵ Partial validation means that the candidate's experience only partially fits the requirements of the qualification (competences, skills and knowledge). Source : <http://www.vae.gouv.fr/espace-ressources/fiches-outil/l-etape-post-jury-vae.html>

référentiels of activities (list of functions and tasks to be performed within the given occupation).

Any certification with a professional end, delivered in the name of the State and created after opinion of a consultative authority in which social partners are represented (CPC – *Commissions Professionnelles Consultatives*; and, CNESER – *Conseil national de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche*), are registered by right on the RNCP¹⁶. Their *référentiels* or standards are regularly updated by these consultative authorities. Other certifications (university degrees - DU; CQP, professional degrees of business schools etc.) are registered on request for limited duration and the request must be renewed.

5 Organisations and institutions involved in validation arrangements and its coordination

The general institutional framework for VAE is under the responsibility of the Ministry in charge of lifelong learning (currently, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Vocational Training and Social Dialogue). The Ministry of employment has played a key coordinating role to implement this new system on the ground, in partnership with the regional council and the other Ministries awarding qualifications.

Specific rules and practices for the implementation of VAE are under the responsibility of each authority awarding qualifications included in the RNCP. This includes chambers of commerce, chambers of trade, different Ministries (Ministries in charge of national education, higher education, agriculture, labour, culture, sports and youth, social affairs, health, defence) and other private training providers.

In the higher education sector, in line with the principle of autonomy of higher education institutions, every institution defines the details of the VAE procedure (for example, design of the VAE file, number of juries a year, composition of the juries...), the price of the stages of the procedure of VAE mentioned in the code of education and labour code and its decree of implementation. The procedure, in every case, has to respect the phases defined by law: information, guidance and counselling are provided to the candidates on the following:

- the choice of the certification,
- the completion of a file describing the knowledge and skills related to the certification,
- the interview and the evaluation by the jury.

Allocation of responsibilities

Information, promotion, and raising awareness about VAE is the joint responsibility of different stakeholders and takes place at different levels (national, both inter-ministry and ministry levels, regional level, provider level, sectoral social partners level and company level). In relation to State diplomas (i.e. those awarded by Ministries), VAE standards and procedures are designed nationally, while the organisation of procedures and assessment and the provision of information, guidance, counselling and support is delegated to the regions.

The promotion and financing of organising collective VAE projects depend on the regional services of the **Ministry of Employment** (the regional offices DIRECCTE - *Directions*

¹⁶ Qualifications awarded by Ministry of Education (CAP, BEP, Bac Pro, BTS...); Ministry of higher education (Bachelor, Master, PhD; Engineer diploma...); Ministry of agriculture; Ministry of Employment; Ministry of Youth and Sports; Ministry of Social affairs.

Qualifications registered « upon request » include qualifications issued by professional branches (CQP); Ministry without consultative committees (Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Culture, etc.); Public institutions (e.g. University diploma); Chambers of commerce and industry, Chamber of trades; private and third sector bodies.

régionales des Entreprises, de la Concurrence, de la Consommation, du Travail et de l'Emploi).

Each Ministry is responsible for setting up general standards for its qualifications, as well as overall quality assurance and evaluation mechanisms.

At national level, cooperation between Ministries takes place between their services. Between 2006 and 2009, an inter-ministerial committee for the development of VAE (*Comité interministériel pour le développement de la VAE - CIDVAE*) included representatives of all Ministries involved. Its activity was suspended in 2009.

Cooperation is now mainly taking place within **Committees of the governing bodies for employment, guidance and vocational training** (CREFOP at the regional level; CNEFOP at the national level)¹⁷. The law of 5 March 2014 and the application decree extended and defined the role of the regions in the area of VAE. In particular, CREFOP and CNEFOP are now the bodies in charge of monitoring the pathways of VAE candidates¹⁸. However for the time being, the Ministry of Employment must still transmit national data on VAE to be included in the draft budget law and in reports. This Ministry is responsible for the evolution of the general legal framework. It also receives surveys conducted at national and regional level and identifies good practice and issues of concern that are submitted by awarding bodies as well as by applicants.

At regional level, the regional services of the Ministry of employment established Committees of bodies awarding qualifications. They are facilitated by regional authorities and involve Ministry services (and in some regions, chambers of commerce and chambers of trade), with the aim of harmonising their practices.

The organisation of VAE takes place at the level of the bodies awarding qualifications, and for the ministries at the level of the bodies approved by every Ministry (e.g. DAVA for education, ASP for health/social affairs, bodies approved by the Ministry of Employment, etc.)¹⁹. Once potential candidates have chosen the qualification they wish to obtain, they can go directly to these structures which provide them with information and guidance about this qualification, the VAE process and individual support available. The verification of the eligibility of the application is carried out by these structures but the assessment sessions are systematically organised by the regional services of the ministries.

The **Ministry of National Education** (currently the main VAE provider in France) is aiming to improve the coordination between the services in charge of implementing VAE in the different Academies (DAVA) and foster the exchange of good practices. Some of the priorities that have been identified, based on local experiments, are described below.

- The improvement of guidance/feedback offered to VAE candidates whose applications are considered eligible, to provide tailored advice at an early stage and help those candidates that are likely to be awarded a partial validation to plan their training in advance. Currently, partial validation is too often perceived by the candidate as a failure

¹⁷ The law of 5 March 2014 created new governance bodies for vocational training: at the national level, a coordination and concertation body, the *Conseil national de l'emploi, de la formation et de l'orientation professionnelles* (CNEFOP), bringing together the State, the regions and social partners. At the regional level, the *Comité régional de l'emploi, de la formation et de l'orientation professionnelles* (CREFOP) streamlines the steering of regional employment and training policies.

¹⁸ According to the IGAEN report on universities and lifelong learning (2014), the law of March 2014 could potentially have the effect to limit access to higher education for beneficiaries of LLL. The governing bodies at regional level (CREFOP) do not include universities. In addition, funding could give priority to the acquisition of Level V (EQF level 3) diploma.

¹⁹ Within each *Académie*, a service called *Dispositif académique de validation des acquis* (DAVA) provides information and guidance to candidates about the qualifications available and the process. The eligibility check and organisation of the assessment (jury sessions) is carried out by the service in charge of examinations (DEC) at the level of the *Académie* or by the DAVA.

and very few of these candidates will continue their training/validation pathway in order to obtain a full qualification.

- The development of online platforms to store applicants' portfolios and make them easily accessible to the members of VAE juries.
- The grouping of applications from different regions for some qualifications for which there is little demand (i.e. the minimum threshold for organising a jury session is not reached) and the use of video-conferencing to organise interviews between the juries and candidates (this is also done by the Ministry of employment).
- The training and professional development of members of VAE juries (validation practitioners).

The **Ministry of higher education** (DGESIP) has developed a roadmap concerning lifelong learning in universities, drawing on the recommendations made by the General Inspectorate (IGAENR, 2014). It includes measures to facilitate VAE, as part of a set of broader strategies to improve lifelong learning guidance services within universities. The IGAENR report (2014) identified that lifelong learning still occupies a marginal role in universities' strategies, and that lifelong learning services are generally lacking support from universities' boards. Moreover, these services generally fail to integrate all aspects of lifelong learning (continuous training, VAE, guidance etc.), resulting in a lack of a coordinated response to the demands of potential beneficiaries. The report notes the modest volume of VAE in universities (about 4 000 VAE per year) in contrast to the qualitative success of the scheme, which has a strong legal base. The report recommends the organisation of marketing campaigns which target specific groups. It also stresses the need to address the share of candidates dropping out of the process by shortening the delays between eligibility and examination of the file by the jury. Application files could be simplified, and partial validation could be encouraged and supported by offering complementary training. Financial incentives could be provided to professional assessors (based on the number of hours rather than the number of candidates). Finally, University Presidents could provide direct and operational support to lifelong learning services.

Education and training providers

The formal education and training sector plays a major role in the development of VAE given that this procedure can lead to an award of formal qualifications. For example, individual upper secondary schools are not directly involved in organising VAE procedures for vocational/technical qualifications (managed by the DAVA and not at the provider level) but VET teachers and trainers are represented in VAE juries.

In relation to qualifications awarded by higher education institutions, all stages are implemented at the provider level. For example, each university is in charge of setting up and implementing their own validation procedures (information, guidance, administrative procedures and organisation of jury sessions). Nevertheless, the procedure must be in line with the rules laid out by the rules of education code and labour code on the implementation of VAE by HE institutions and therefore only the details of implementation differ. For instance, differences can be seen in the information phase (individual or collective information), in the type of counselling proposed to the individual, and in the number of juries organised per year. Each institution also has to plan quality assurance and evaluation processes.

The level of development of VAE across higher education institutions is heterogeneous. Overall, those higher education institutions with a strong tradition of involvement in continuous training provision are generally the most proactive in developing and promoting the use of VAE. The level of involvement and acceptance of VAE in the university sector is generally increasing, but some cultural, organisational and financial barriers remain. For example, a strong hindrance factor is insufficient level of interest for VAE among university professors and their involvement in related procedures (e.g. as members of VAE juries), which is partly due to the fact that this role can be time-consuming and is not always being

well recognised in terms of career development. On the other hand, some university professors acknowledge that VAE fulfils a social purpose and also brings added value in their own work, as the process of evaluating learning outcomes acquired in other contexts brings new insights into the relevance of existing qualifications.

Box 1 The role of the network of services for collective validation at university level

At higher education level, innovative approaches can also be identified in relation to the use of **online application and documentation tools**, use of video-conferencing and remote support; some universities can provide a whole VAE procedure online.

The network of the VAE services at university level (www.fcu.fr), which is linked to the conference of directors of university services for continuous training, contributes to the exchange of information on innovative practices in the field of VAE. Recently, the network issued a guide on how to implement VAE for PhD qualifications, which provides a methodology in line with both general provisions on VAE as well as standards applicable to PhD qualifications.

The network is particularly efficient at dealing with the companies' need to qualify their employees by using the VAE procedure: the grouping of applications in one university, which is charged to examine the applications and dispatch them afterwards to the other universities, according to the needs of the applicants and the degree they want to get, makes VAE easier for companies.

In April 2015, the FCU published a guide concerning collective validation: "Conduire un projet collectif de VAE en direction des entreprises". The guide contains methodological "fiches" to support universities and CNAM (Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers) to carry out collective validation.

Private sector actors (including social partners)

Chambers of commerce, chambers of trade, private training providers or social partners are directly responsible for implementing VAE procedures related to the type of qualifications they award. They take charge of the entire process, from the provision of information to candidates to the organisation of jury sessions, certification, and providing quality assurance. Private sector actors are not directly involved in the VAE procedure if the targeted qualification is a State diploma, but the legislation foresees that at least 25 % of the jury members are professionals, which may include representatives of the private sector. Private sector actors also contribute to awareness raising and promotion of VAE, regardless of the type of qualification targeted. At the national inter-sectoral level, social partners can contribute to shape the general policy framework on VAE, through the adoption of inter-sectoral collective agreements.

Sectoral bipartite organisations in charge of vocational training and the OPCA (bipartite training funds), as well as individual employers, play an essential role in promoting the use of VAE for workers, including through the development of so-called collective VAE (groups of workers undertaking individual VAE procedures). Collective VAE projects can be put in place for various employees of the same company or for employees from different companies performing similar occupations in a given sector (this is organised with the support of the OPCA or sectoral bipartite organisations).

VAE can be used by employers as a useful tool as part of their human resources policies, with a view to:

- Raising qualification levels among staff, contributing to the professional development of employees while limiting training costs
- Facilitating occupational mobility of workers and managing needs of specific groups of employees, assessing training and recruitment needs

- Improving social dialogue, stimulating interaction between employees and between employees and management.

Some measures were included in the 2009 law on guidance and lifelong learning, stipulating that the issue of VAE must be addressed by the social partners during their sectoral negotiations.

6 Information, advice and guidance

6.1 Awareness-raising and recruitment

Awareness-raising and recruitment is the joint responsibility of different stakeholders.

Since 2002, a network of regional offices provide information about VAE, called *Points Relais Conseil* (PRC). Such structures act as a focal point at the regional level: to provide basic information about the VAE process; to analyse individual's pathways; to identify the corresponding qualifications matching their profile and refer potential applicants to the relevant awarding body (see also 6.2). A stock taking report on the activities of PRC (Réseau CARIF OREF, 2015) highlights that the situation varies across regions (some have one network, others have a diversity of structures).

The general information portal on VAE is under the responsibility of the ministry in charge of employment (www.vae.gouv.fr). It provides information on VAE for the public - including employers - on the procedure with a lot of tools on the use of the VAE and access to reference documents and to a list of the 922 regional PRC²⁰. This website was revamped in 2014, in order to provide better information services for potential candidates, employers and validation practitioners. Since its launch, the single monthly visit rate has doubled.

Sector specific websites have also been developed by ministries or bodies with a public service mission (e.g. healthcare, vae.asp-public.fr) and by branches or bipartite training funds (www.batiprovae.fr).

All services of the authorities delivering a certificate provide information, guidance and support to candidates on the certificate they are interested in²¹.

The law of March 2014 has increased the decentralisation of the support to candidates, extending the responsibilities of the regions. They can lead awareness-raising activities and contribute to collective VAE projects.

Other types of stakeholders/agencies can also provide general information to candidates and can refer them to the right contact points:

- Public Employment Services, including Mission locales (for young people);
- Other guidance providers (not part of PRC network);
- Sectoral social partners.

Although there are no recent studies on the general level of awareness about VAE opportunities, it is estimated that this is increasing as the current scheme has been in place

²⁰ See map : <http://www.vae.gouv.fr/?page=carte-prc>

²¹ For instance, regional services depending on the Ministry of Education in charge in VAE (DAVA) - DAVA are primarily intended to support candidates who are interested in acquiring a qualification delivered by the Ministry of National Education, but can provide initial guidance to all candidates regardless of the qualification targeted.

Different stakeholders involved in the field of guidance/continuous training/skills audit - including local offices of the Association for the vocational training of adults (AFPVA), sectoral training funds, and the networks of education and training institutions in charge of adult training (GRETA), etc.;

for 15 years now, since 2002²². In addition, the validation procedure to get access to the higher education sector (VAPP 85) is well-known as has been in place since 1985.

6.1 Information, advice and guidance (IAG)

Every individual has the right to receive information and advice on the VAE process. It is important to distinguish between IAG provided before the eligibility check and IAG provided afterwards, once the individual interested in VAE has become a “candidate”.

Information, advice and guidance provided before engaging in VAE procedure

As mentioned above, early information and advice are provided by the regional information points (PRC), as well as a range of different stakeholders. Information and advice provided by PRCs are personalised and free of costs.

In 2013, more than 60 000 individuals benefited from an interview with a PRC. This represented a 3 % increase compared to 2012. Two third of beneficiaries were women. This can be explained by the high demand concerning qualifications in health and social sectors. Most beneficiaries were between 30 and 44 years old. Only 16 % had no diploma and one third had a (EQF level 3) diploma; half were unemployed (Réseau CARIF OREF, 2015).

The number of individuals informed by PRC is not directly linked to the number of individuals engaging in a VAE process. Based on the advice given by PRCs, individuals can be oriented towards other types of mechanisms. Not all interested individuals are eligible for VAE. Besides, information and advice by PRCs is not compulsory, potential candidates can receive information from other structures, or address themselves directly to certification bodies. Overall, candidates confirm their VAE projects following information provided by PRCs in 70 % of cases (Réseau CARIF OREF, 2015).

Information, advice and guidance provided after the candidate is considered eligible to VAE

Since the adoption of the Decree of 12 November 2014, support to candidates is officially part of the VAE process. Support (*accompagnement*) is provided commencing at the point when the validation application is declared eligible and stopping when it is examined by the jury (Art. 6423.2). *Accompagnement* consists of methodological support to describe the activities and experience of the candidate (in relation to the occupational standards of the targeted qualification), to develop their portfolio, and to prepare for the interview with the jury (and when applicable, the reconstruction of a professional situation).

The decree also specifies that based on the recommendation of a representative of an organisation belonging to the public guidance services, support can also comprise guidance and support to find funding in order to undertake complementary training corresponding to the requirements of the qualification standards or corresponding to a block of competences (*bloc de compétences*)²³ – one part of the qualification standard – missing in the candidates’ experiential pathway (Art. 6423.3).

Support to VAE candidates or “*accompagnement*”, is provided after admission of the application by the structure/awarding body responsible for the organisation of the procedure

²² An official stock-taking report on VAE published in 2008 reported that, according to a survey, the general public is relatively well informed about VAE, however, the less qualified are also the less aware about VAE opportunities.

²³ The Law of 5 March 2014 refers to the notion of “blocks of competences”. It can be seen as a way to facilitate the implementation of “mixed pathways”, combining VAE and complementary training. This should ease access to a diploma through a variety of differentiated pathways. The General Inspectorate recommend the opening up of VAE to the logic of “blocks of competence” to take into account learning outcomes from initial training, professional experience and continuous training (IGEN-IGAENR, 2015).

or by a specialised counselling provider; this can be either at the provider level (e.g. universities) or at the regional level.

For example, concerning vocational and technical qualifications (delivered by the Ministry of national education), guidance and counselling is provided by a service called DAVA in each *Académie*. During the first phase of the application (eligibility check), advisors working at the DAVA provide initial information and guidance on how to submit an application to candidates. This is entirely free of charge. As part of the second part of the application, DAVA can also provide intensive counselling upon request of the candidate (not free of charge), to help them prepare their portfolio. Counselling can be provided individually or collectively, depending on the needs of the candidates and the working practices of each DAVA. In practice the network of GRETA (local networks of education and training institutions involved in the provision of training courses for adults) are also involved in the provision of support to candidates.

In the Ministry of Employment, authorised organisations provide this service, including AFPA which is its biggest operator.

In the field of health and social care qualifications, guidance on VAE and services to candidates are provided by a structure called ASP (*Agence de Services et Paiement*) on behalf of different Ministries.

In the higher education sector (universities), support to VAE candidates is provided by the specific service in charge of VAE and/or continuous training. Counselling is generally provided by a team of two professionals, including a general guidance practitioner and a professor responsible for the type of qualification targeted.

Private providers can also provide counselling and support on how to prepare their application and their portfolio to candidates.

Though counselling is not mandatory, it is a very important element of the validation process increasing significantly the chances of success of the candidate.

6.2 Measures to enhance the awareness of validation initiatives and practices amongst guidance practitioners

Guidance practitioners are well informed about VAE as its use has been continuously encouraged for some time and the current system has been in place for 14 years. At the regional and local level, a number of specific initiatives are also in place to enhance the level of awareness of VAE among guidance practitioners. For example, the region of Ile-de-France through its VAE information service (*Pôle Régional Information Conseil en VAE*) organises regular information sessions on VAE for all counsellors/advisors/practitioners working in the field of vocational guidance, labour market services and social inclusion. The target group includes professionals from the Public Employment Service (*Pôle Emploi*) as well as other stakeholders such as APEC (national association for the promotion of employment of managers), *missions locales* (local structures offering vocational guidance and placement services for young people) and other employment and training stakeholders.²⁴

The professionalism of stakeholders providing guidance and advice, and the cooperation between all stakeholders involved in the process (guidance, support, evaluation) are part of the key success factors of the VAE procedure.

It should be noted that the provision of guidance on VAE is integrated within lifelong guidance in France. Typically, professionals in charge of providing advice on VAE can also offer general occupational/vocational guidance and advice on lifelong learning opportunities.

²⁴ http://www.infovae-idf.com/jcms/c_5580/les-professionnels-de-l-ai-o



For example, some regional PRCs are Information and counselling centres (*Centres d'information et d'orientation* - CIO), whose core mission is to provide guidance to pupils in initial education and training.

7 Validation practitioners

7.1 Profile of validation practitioners

Validation practitioners include administrative staff, staff in charge of guidance and support, and members of VAE juries.

Generally, administrative staff (but in some cases, teachers or trainers) are in charge of the receipt of the application and performing an administrative check on Livret 1.

A jury carries out the actual validation and evaluation of the content of the portfolio (Livret 2). The profile of VAE jury members is heterogeneous. According to the legislation, at least 25 % of jury members must be qualified professionals (half of them employers and half of them employees). The rest of jury members are teachers or trainers – with the exception of juries of the Ministry of employment and professional sectors where they are all professionals. The professional jury members receive a compensation to participate in the assessment sessions if they take time off or if they are recently retired. Otherwise, the employers who provide their qualified staff to be jury members are entitled to be paid remuneration and travel expenses.

Concerning VAE procedures at the Ministry of National Education, a report published in 2011 by the IGAENR highlighted that in practice, it is difficult to ensure a balance between employers and employees representing the profession (IGAENR, 2011).

In higher education institutions, the jury must be composed of a majority of professors who are very familiar with the qualification standards and professionals in the area; a balance between female and male members has to be respected.

7.2 Qualification requirements

Qualification requirements for VAE jury members depend on the subject field and vary for each targeted qualification.

In the legislative and regulatory provisions, there are no requirements in terms of experience in the professional domain targeted by the qualifications. Jury members must have relevant experience as professionals or teachers.

In the Ministry of Employment however, individuals wishing to become jurors must provide evidence of at least five years of experience in the trade covered by the title and not having left their position for more than five years.

A code of ethics for VAE jury²⁵ was published by the inter-ministerial Committee of the development of the VAE, during its mandate.

7.3 Provision of training and support to validation practitioners

Each awarding body and regional structure for VAE are in charge of providing training to VAE jury members, as well as guidance practitioners. These arrangements may differ.

Jury members involved in validation sessions with respect to professional titles (in the area of the Ministry in charge of employment) are accredited professionals who must have very good knowledge of the rules related to the award of titles and of the organisation of validation sessions. The Ministry has designed a standard training format (for general purposes) for new jury members. The format is based on simulation games, whereby the trainee has to adopt the role of jury member. The training covers all aspects related to

²⁵ *Charte de déontologie des membres de jury de VAE*, available at: <http://www.vae.gouv.fr/espace-ressources/fiches-outil/charte-de-deontologie-des-membres-de-jury-de-vae.html>

accreditation and all stages of validation. The jury members then undertake more specialised training regarding the qualifications for which they are accredited. Training is not compulsory.

Within the Ministry of National Education, the training of VAE jury members is currently considered as a priority for further development. A challenge reported by a recent report of the inspectorate general IGAENR (2011) on the functioning of validation juries is the fact that jury members too often lack experience in similar contexts (e.g. as tutors, mentors or jury members) and therefore are not familiar with the methodology and procedure used, and would benefit from common tools.

In the higher education sector, many higher education institutions have developed their own internal training courses and material for validation practitioners. In addition, the conference of directors of university services for continuous training (*Conférence des Directeurs de Service Universitaire de Formation Continue*) organises training courses for VAE guidance practitioners, members of VAE juries and staff responsible for VAE. These sessions are open to participants from all across France. For example, a regular one day training course is organised for VAE jury members on an annual basis. This training course introduces the main principles about VAE and methodologies to support jury members as part of the assessment of applications (e.g. use of different tools and criteria). The focus of the training is practical and case studies are presented.

8 Quality assurance

Quality assurance systems / procedures

The 2002 legislation on VAE and decree sets some general criteria on the procedure, including on the functioning and composition of VAE juries.

In relation to the provision of support to VAE applicants, a number of methodological tools have been developed by State services in order to outline a set of key principles for the provision of support (after the first part of the application – i.e. for those applications considered eligible).²⁶

The main objective is to ensure consistent level of the quality of support provided.

In addition, a number of regional quality charters for the support of VAE candidates have been signed by the State and the regional authorities.²⁷ They focus on various aspects such as providing suitable conditions to receive candidates, ensuring the transparency of the procedures, guaranteeing the confidentiality of the procedure, providing quality support services with reasonable waiting times consistent with the needs of the candidates, ensuring the professional standards of practitioners, and developing cooperation and information exchange between institutions.

The quality approach results in the implementation of satisfaction surveys and the monitoring of candidates' pathways.

VAE quality assurance systems/procedures (regarding the organisation of the procedure and the characteristics of validation practitioners) are the responsibility of each awarding body awarding (at the Ministry/national level or at the provider level). However, the laws and regulations on the control and quality of vocational continuing education and training apply largely to VAE.

Evaluation framework

²⁶ Available at: <http://www.vae.gouv.fr/espace-ressources/fiches-outil/l-accompagnement-en-vae-quelques-reperes-methodologiques.html>

²⁷ For instance, charter signed between the State and the Bretagne region: <http://bretagne.directe.gouv.fr/Charte-Qualite-de-l-accompagnement>

The collection of data from different Ministries on flows of VAE beneficiaries is carried out by the research department of the Ministry of Labour (*Direction de l'animation de la recherche, des études et des statistiques*, DARES).

Within the Ministry of National Education, the Directorate for Evaluation, Prospective and Performance (DEPP) carries out annual surveys on the activities of the DAVA, in relation to State technological and vocational qualifications (secondary and tertiary level) and on VAE procedures carried out by higher education institutions.

An official public report taking stock of the implementation of VAE at the national level since the introduction of the procedure was published in 2008 (Besson, 2008), followed by another report prepared by a working group (Merle et al. 2009); no general evaluation or stocktaking report has been published since.

A proposal for an evaluation of public policies in the field of VAE was launched early 2016 driven by the general services for the modernisation of public action and conducted by the General Inspectorate of Social Affairs (IGAS), the General Inspection of education (IGEN) and the General inspectorate of the administration of national education and research (IGAENR). Their study resulted in specifications in order to define the scope and criteria for the evaluation of the whole VAE system. A new committee called CODEV took place in May 2016, gathering all the stakeholders of VAE: the State represented by all the ministries delivering degrees, the social partners, and representatives of regional bodies to discuss the specifications and the work to be undertaken. In September 2016, the new committee will make concrete proposals in order to simplify the VAE process, reinforce its quality and increase the number of applicants.

Each body awarding qualifications is expected to develop their own evaluation of the implementation of VAE, review the process and procedures used for VAE on a continuous basis, and make the necessary improvements. For example, the implementation of VAE procedures at the Ministry of National Education has been examined by the Inspectorate General of the Administration of National Education and Research (IGAENR). The latest report issued by the IGAENR focusing specifically on VAE (2011) refers to the functioning of validation juries. This report concluded that there is a need to foster the exchange of good practice concerning the work of VAE juries, for instance by setting up a common database of good practice, tools, and reference materials. More recent reports (IGEN-IGAENR, 2015; IGAENR, 2014) include VAE in the evaluation of broader policies (e.g. LLL in universities, or the introduction of competence units in vocational training). They highlight a number of shortcomings concerning current VAE arrangements, for example the lack of recognition of pathways combining initial training, professional experience and continuous training (IGEN-IGAENR, 2015).

The General Inspectorate of Cultural Affairs (IGAC) published a report in 2013 on the implementation of VAE in higher education institutions reporting to the Ministry of Culture. The report highlights a number of challenges linked to the application of the legislation, the provision of guidance to candidates whose application is considered eligible, and the clarification of assessment practices used by juries. It includes a number of recommendations, for instance on the development of information and promotion mechanisms as well as monitoring mechanisms linked to VAE within the Ministry.

9 Inputs, outputs and outcomes

9.1 Funding

In France, VAE is funded by public and private sources.

Actors which intervene in the financing of VAE are:

- Regional councils, for the organisation and funding of information centres which provide information on VAE to the general public and provide support to candidates.

- *Pôle Emploi*, provides funding for the costs which are not covered by regional councils, for candidates who are also job-seekers.
- OPCA, which collect contributions from companies in relation to training, can also provide information on VAE and finance the set of costs related to support and assessment of candidates who are employed.
- Companies can finance some VAE actions.
- The State, through the DGEFP, within the framework of collective actions supporting employment.
- The candidates themselves.

Funding streams are very complex due to the variety of stakeholders involved.

Public funding is part of the overall budget from lifelong learning including State funding – within each Ministry concerned and regional funding – regional authorities can allocate funding with a view to support the development of VAE.

Regional authorities are responsible for the Information and Guidance centres and they also finance them. The public employment services, *Pôle Emploi*, also contribute to the funding of VAE. Information and guidance centres can also receive funding from the European Social Fund.

Concerning the volume of public funding, no consolidated data is available. For instance, within the Ministry of Education, there is no specific budget line allocated to VAE. Within each *Académie*, functioning costs of the services in charge of VAE (DAVA) are integrated within the general budget. This funding is allocated internally and may therefore differ across *Académies*. Similarly, universities receive a global budget from the State which does not include a specific budget line for VAE.

In addition, a part of the DAVA revenues are generated by counselling activities offered to candidates during the second phase of the application.

Private funding sources include:

- bipartite bodies - funds for individual training leave, *Fonds de Gestion des Congés Individuels de Formation* (FONGECIF) or *Organismes paritaires collecteurs agréés* (OPCA), which are sectoral bodies managed by social partners and whom collect taxes from employers and employees in order to finance and develop training;
- additional contributions from employers;
- candidates.

Bipartite funds collecting employees' and employers' contributions for continuous vocational training (OPCA) are a major contributor as they fund individual leave to undertake a skills audit (*bilans de compétences*) or VAE.

In 2014, OPCA financed²⁸:

- 7 895 individuals' leave for VAE (long-term contracts) amounting to EUR 10.47 million (average cost: EUR 1 326); or 155 000 hours (average: 20).
- 32 % of beneficiaries were employed by companies with less than 20 employees.
- 67 % of beneficiaries were blue-collar workers and employees.
- 70 % of beneficiaries were women.
- In addition, 210 VAE for short-term contracts were financed, amounting to EUR 281 851.

²⁸ Data provided by the Ministry of Employment.

By comparison, in 2013, OPCAs had financed a total of 7 774 individuals leave for VAE, for an average duration of 19 hours and an average cost of around 1 300 euros.

Examples of national, regional, local or EU funded initiatives

Examples of implementation of VAE mobilising public funds are numerous, at all levels.

Pôle Emploi (PES) and regional councils finance individual VAE requests for job-seekers.

Regional services of the Ministry of Employment manage, finance or co-finance (with regional councils, professional branches, OPCA or *Pôle Emploi*) schemes or projects aiming at collective VAE. They can target several qualifications, either in one company (for instance to secure pathways of vulnerable employees, with the support of the State) or in one given territory.

The implementation of a collective VAE scheme aims to provide a set of services to the person wishing to undertake an individual VAE process; this person is supported throughout the process (for instance, platform of VAE providers in Rhône-Alpes region, See Box 2 below). Collective VAE projects are the result of a pre-established diagnosis highlighting the need for competences, or for a strategy at company level or territory level.

In 2015, AFPA (Association for the training of adults), *Pôle Emploi* and the Ministry of employment experimented with a collective VAE scheme in five regions, involving 300 job seekers. The scheme is innovative and addresses some complex aspects of VAE. It allowed the job seekers to get access to a professional certificate in less than 6 months. The success rate was high (87 % success in access to the professional title and 69 % success in access to employment).

Box 2 Platform of VAE providers in Rhône Alpes region

VAE can be part of a collective project piloted by a company that wishes to use VAE as a tool for human resource management. Companies interested in such a project can contact the platform of bodies awarding qualifications in the Rhône-Alpes region. This platform gathers public and private stakeholders involved in certification and validation: AFPA, AGERA, DIRECCTE, DRAAF, DRJSCS, Éducation Nationale, Universités Rhônealpines. The platform was created in 2008. Its objectives are to:

- steer collective VAE projects that involve several bodies in certification;
- foster collaboration between these bodies; and,
- build a process that encourages the use of VAE in the forecasting and management of employment and skills (GPEC).

Source: <http://www.vae-certificateurs.fr>

The use of VAE is also being promoted as part of the flagship initiative launched in 2012 by the government to support (low-skilled) young people facing difficulties to access the labour market, the Subsidised jobs programme (Emplois d'Avenir)²⁹. Participants in this nation-wide scheme (co-funded by the State) undertake different types of training activities during their work contract; in addition to formal training, this experience offers a broad range of opportunities for informal and non-formal learning. Participants are supported individually by a counsellor who monitors their individual development. Counsellors should advise young people on how to use VAE at the end of their contract in order to get their learning outcomes formally recognised and improve their employment prospects. The government's target to enrol 150 000 young people as part of the scheme by the end 2014 was achieved. However, no target was defined concerning the number of VAE applications following participation in

²⁹ <http://www.gouvernement.fr/action/les-emplois-d-avenir>

the scheme. The government announced that the scheme would be continued in 2015; however it is not clear whether the scheme is continuing in 2016.

The *Académie* of Créteil launched a project called “Passport to VAE” targeting young people benefiting from the *Emplois d’avenir* scheme. It consists of a tool to record evidence of activities and experience, which will facilitate a future VAE application. The project is supported with financing from the ESF. Following a pilot phase, it could be deployed at the national level.³⁰

9.2 Distribution of costs

No consolidated data is available on the real average costs and the distribution of costs linked to VAE (costs related to the design of the standards, the VAE procedure itself and the provision of information and guidance to candidates, the counselling, the set-up of VAE juries, etc.). Most of the cost is related to the counselling proposed to the applicant during the second phase of the procedure.

Estimates of the costs of VAE for employees (whose costs are covered by OPCA) are the following (based on an average of 20 hours of leave, registration fees, assessment sessions and support): on average the costs amount to EUR 1 326 for an employee on an open-ended contract, and EUR 1 342 for an employee with a temporary contract. The costs of information, guidance, counselling, before the submission of an application file, are not taken into account in these estimates since they are supported by ad hoc structures such as the PRCs. An OPCA can be referenced as a PRC.

The costs charged to candidates vary depending on the targeted qualification/ awarding authority (generally no more than EUR 1 000) and the status of applicants. Administrative/ registration fees may apply in some cases. In the higher education sector, fees for VAE are set by the management board within each institution.

Importantly, VAE candidates can apply for different types of financial support depending on their status (employed, unemployed), their age, etc. According to an annual survey of VAE procedures managed by the Ministry of Education, only 5 % of the candidates in receipt of qualifications awarded by this Ministry did not benefit from any form of financial support in 2011 (DEPP, 2012). So to sum up, individuals can have their VAE financed by their company or by a bipartite body when they are employees, by *Pôle Emploi* (public employment services) or the Region when they are unemployed.

9.3 Evidence of benefits to individuals

There is limited scientific evidence available on the net benefits to individuals of undertaking a VAE procedure at the national level, although some studies may have been carried out at the regional and/or local level and some case studies may have been undertaken. No comprehensive overview on the literature has been carried out so far. The grey literature (including online guidance material on VAE) suggests that there is a broad range of positive impacts for individuals engaging in VAE, in terms of self-esteem and personal development, self-efficacy, motivation to learn and participation in further training, employability, career development prospects and well-being in the workplace. In addition, it should be noted that many individuals engage in VAE because they need to acquire a specific type of qualification to work in their occupation of choice (e.g. in childcare). For these individuals, VAE offers a relevant alternative to participation in a formal training course.

Based on data from the Ministry of Employment, holding a professional qualification (qualifications awarded by the Ministry) is a key factor to increase integration in the labour

³⁰ See website: <https://www.defi-metiers.fr/breves/le-passeport-vers-une-vae-veritable-outil-de-capitalisation-pour-les-jeunes>

market: 66 % of title holders have access to employment within six months of obtaining their certification. However, the number of VAE candidates has been decreasing since 2012 for the awarding Ministries (DGEFP 2015). French authorities still have to facilitate the sharing of data with other awarding bodies in order to know if this decline is confirmed or if the difference is just caused by the entrance of other awarding bodies in the VAE system.

9.4 Beneficiaries and users of validation processes

9.4.1 Validation trends

Data on flows of VAE beneficiaries is only available for those qualifications awarded by Ministries, including higher education qualifications (i.e. excluding qualifications awarded by chambers of commerce and trade, sectoral social partners, university diploma and private training providers) (see Box 3).

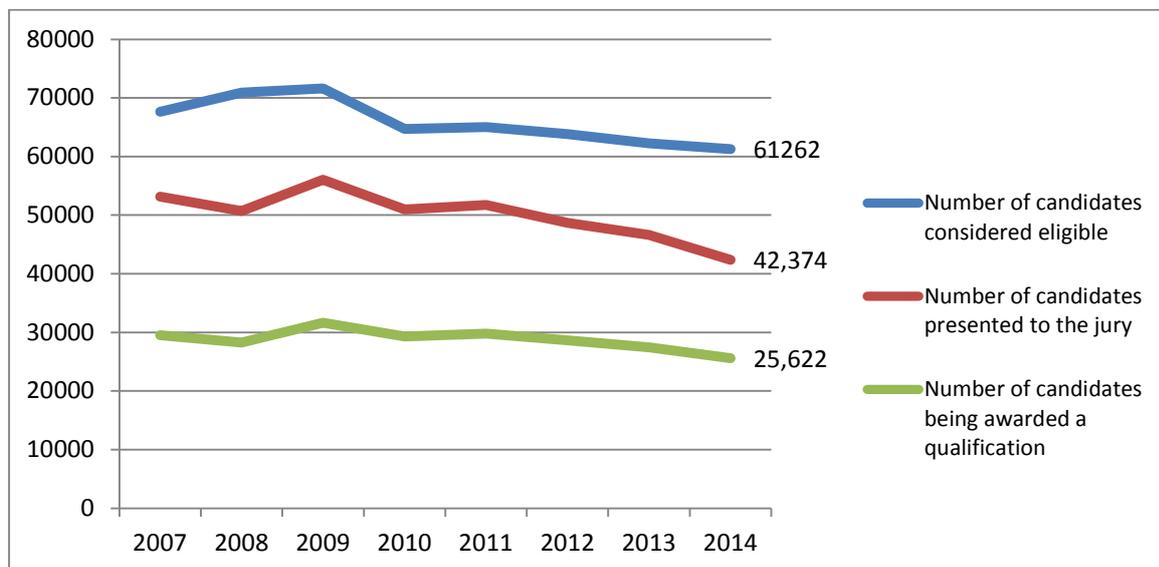
Looking at the qualifications awarded by Ministries (*ministères certificateurs*) since the beginning of the implementation of VAE, **a total number of approx. 307 400 qualifications (full validation) were awarded through VAE between 2003 and 2014** (DARES data, in Ministère des Finances, 2015).

Immediately following the introduction of the new legislation on VAE in 2002, the take-up of validation in France increased significantly, according to data collected from different Ministries. In 2010-2011, the number of VAE candidates considered eligible had stabilised around 65 000 applications per year (after reaching a peak in 2009). However, since 2011, numbers of candidates (eligible and successful) are decreasing slightly. This is shown in Figure 9.1 below.

In 2014, about **42 400 candidates** presented themselves in front of a jury in order to obtain a qualification through VAE. This represented a decrease of 8 % compared to 2013. This was after numbers had already declined between 2012 and 2013 (5 % less candidates in 2013 compared to 2012). In 2014, about **25 600 candidates obtained a qualification (complete validation) through VAE** (7 % decrease compared to 2013). This number had already decreased between 2011 and 2013 (Ministère des Finances, 2015).

In 2014, the Ministry of Education remained the main awarding body for VAE, with 52 % of total number of qualifications awarded through VAE. In total, more than 600 diplomas (at Level V, VI and III in the French classification) awarded by the Ministry of Education can be obtained through VAE (IGEN-IGAENR, 2015). However, the demand is concentrated on a small number of qualifications. The second most important was the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs (21 %), followed by the Ministry of employment (14 %) (Ministère des Finances, 2015).

Figure 9.1 Number of VAE candidates considered eligible, going through the full process, and successful candidates, 2007-2014



Source: DARES³¹. Scope: qualifications awarded through VAE by all Ministries (missing data: Ministry of Youth and sport, 2007-2011).

Scope: 2014: data from Ministry of culture not available.

Box 3 National statistics on VAE and exchange of information among Ministries

The DGEFP (Delegation for employment and vocational training) plays a coordinating role between the Ministries which are awarding qualifications that can be obtained through VAE. It coordinates working groups related to procedures, implementation and the monitoring of VAE.

The prime responsibility for data collection belongs to the different institutions acting as VAE providers. Each body allowed to award a qualification through VAE is responsible for collecting and compiling data on VAE. However, in order to provide an overview of the number of users at national level, data transmission protocols have been established since 2007 between the Ministry of Employment and other key ministries (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Higher Education and Research, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministries of Health and Social Affairs, Department for Employment, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development and Energy, and Ministry of Youth and Sports).

A major gap in the current statistical system is the fact that so far, data on qualifications awarded by Chambers of Commerce and Trade and other bodies through VAE is not centralised. Another limitation is that data does not allow a thorough analysis or description of the pathways of VAE candidates (for instance, length of time to obtain a qualification, by Ministry).

³¹ The DARES (research institute under the Ministry of Employment) compiles annual aggregated data from various ministries involved in VAE (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Higher Education and Research, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministries of Health and Social Affairs, Department for Employment, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development and Energy & Ministry of Youth and Sports). Qualifications awarded by Ministries (State diploma) account for about 85% of all qualifications awarded through VAE. Data on qualifications awarded by chambers of commerce and trade and CQP through VAE are not centralised

The DARES, a research institute within the Ministry of Employment, compiles annual data received from various Ministries and also prepares summary tables. Datasets based on the information collected by Ministries and covering the 2007-2013 period are publicly available on the website of the DARES, while the national information portal of VAE also provides links to available statistics. Datasets currently available at national level concern:

- Participation (total and by Ministry, per year): number of eligible candidates (i.e. who fulfil the required conditions to apply to VAE); number of candidates assessed, total as well as by socioeconomic characteristics of participants (sex, age, labour market status); and level of qualifications in the French qualification framework that is the focus of the VAE procedure;
- Achievement (total and by Ministry, per year): number of candidates who have received a full qualification; partial awards are not covered.

The DARES also publishes annual reports (including more detailed information including data on validation users by qualification that is for the most common qualifications). The latest available annual report (2013) covers data on the year of 2012.

Recent developments are linked to the law of 5 March 2014 and decree of 12 November 2014.

Currently, national statistics on VAE do not allow the conduct of a detailed analysis of pathways followed by VAE candidates (e.g. time spent to obtain a qualification or cost of the procedure), but it is expected that the monitoring of validation will be further developed and harmonised at regional level. A working group including the key stakeholders involved in VAE from three regions (Rhône-Alpes, Bretagne and Lorraine) and the Ministry of Employment met three times in 2013 to discuss technical solutions which have been implemented to develop regional databases on the implementation of VAE.

A legal basis concerning the monitoring of VAE, defining clearer responsibilities in the area, has been recently adopted. Article 6 of the Law of 5 March 2014 introduced new provisions in the Labour Code, according to which the regional committees on employment, training and vocational guidance (CREFOP) and the national council for employment, training and vocational guidance (CNEFOP) are in charge of the statistical monitoring of the use of VAE. Furthermore, the Decree of 12 November 2014 has also introduced provisions in the regulatory part of the Labour Code. As part of their responsibilities mentioned in Articles L. 6423-1 and L. 6423-2 of the Labour Code, the regional committees of employment, training and vocational guidance and the National Council on employment, training and vocational guidance are tasked to undertake a statistical monitoring of VAE candidates from the beginning to the end of the procedure (in case of partial validation, until awarded credits remain valid). Anonymous data has to be submitted by VAE providers (both public and private organisations). The National Council for Employment, training and vocational guidance ensures the harmonisation of categories of data collected to allow the monitoring of candidates and their pathways.

Sources: Information available from DARES publications on VAE; VAE online portal; preparatory document for the adoption of the 2015 national budget (République Française; Annexe au projet de loi de finances pour 2015 – Formation professionnelle) and exchanges with the Ministry of Employment.

9.4.2 Validation users

Data collected from different Ministries is also available on the profile of VAE applicants. As shown in the table below, most VAE applicants are adult workers, females and target secondary level VET qualifications (Level V, corresponding to ISCED level 3c or EQF level 3).

However, the profiles of candidates vary strongly depending on the type of qualification targeted. For the most important Ministry in terms of qualifications awarded through VAE

(Ministry of education with 20 682 applications examined in 2013), the average candidate in 2013 was female (65 %), between 30 and 50 years of age (80 %), employed (72 %), targeting a qualification at Level III or ISCED 5 (46 %). For candidates applying to qualifications awarded by the Ministry of Higher Education, the ratio between men/women is almost equal. However, for qualifications awarded by the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, candidates are almost exclusively female (96 %). Across all ministries, the share of candidates below 30 years of age varies between 10 and 14 % while the share of candidates above 50 years of age varies between 14 and 25 %.

Finally, the level of qualification targeted varies significantly: for qualifications pertaining to the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, 86 % of candidates targeted a diploma at Level V (lower qualification level - ISCED 3c), and this was also the case for 58 % of applicants targeting a qualification awarded by the Ministry of Employment.

Table 9.1 Profile of VAE candidates across different Ministries, 2011-2013

	Ministry of Education			Ministry of Higher Education and Research			Ministry of Health and Social Affairs (2)			Ministry of Employment (3)		
	2011	2012	2013	2011	2012	2013	2011	2012	2013	2011	2012	2013
Gender												
Men	33.5	30.7	34.2	ND	ND	50.9	4.1	4.3	4.2	48.9	44.6	38.3
Women	66.5	69.3	65.8	ND	ND	49.1	95.9	95.7	95.8	51.1	55.4	61.7
Age												
Less than 30	9.9	11.5	9.9	6.4	5.0	5.3	7.9	8.3	9.6	20.3	16.0	13.8
30-39	35.6	36.2	34.9	36.8	38.3	34.9	25.3	25.4	25.5	28.4	28.4	29.9
40-49	40.5	36.6	40.8	39.7	39.5	41.3	41.9	41.1	40.1	34.2	35.8	38.0
50+	14.0	15.6	14.5	17.1	17.2	18.5	24.9	25.2	24.9	17.1	19.8	18.3
Situation												
Unemployed - active	25.0	26.0	26.6	14,2 (1)	14,5 (1)	ND	22.7	25.8	26.9	62.3	57.0	59.3
Employed	74.1	72.9	72.7	85,2 (1)	85,1 (1)	ND	70.5	73.8	72.7	37.7	42.9	40.7
Inactive	0.9	1.1	0.6	0,6 (1)	0,4 (1)	ND	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.0
Level of the diploma												
Level V- ISCED 3c	25.4	24.0	21.0	ND	ND	ND	88.4	87.3	86.1	58.1	59.5	57.8
Level IV - ISCED 3	29.2	29.5	30.7	ND	ND	ND	0.4	0.3	0.3	21.6	19.0	19.6
Level III- ISCED 5	43.0	43.7	46.1	ND	ND	ND	7.9	8.7	10.1	19.8	21.1	22.6
Level II - ISCED 6	1.2	1.4	1.1	ND	ND	ND	3.1	3.5	3.3	0.5	0.5	0.0
Level I - ISCED 6	1.3	1.3	1.1	ND	ND	ND	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total number of candidates presented	20 948	20 762	20 682	4 324	4 311	4 298	17 147	15 824	14 456	8 126	6 276	5 079

Source: DARES. Scope: Four main Ministries involved in VAE (covering about 95 % of all candidates).

(1) Data on candidates obtaining all or part of diploma.

(2) Data do not include certificates for functions of Director of social institutions (Cafdes)

(3) 2010 and 2011: data only on candidates presenting an application to AFPA.

Qualifications awarded by the Ministry of Employment (ISCED 3 to ISCED 6)

In 2014, there were 3 567 vocational qualifications (*titres professionnels*)³² awarded by VAE for the Ministry of employment. Holding a vocational title is a factor of integration on the labour market. 66 % of title holders have access to employment within 6 months after obtaining their certification. However, the number of VAE candidates continues to decrease since 2012. Between 2013 and 2014, the number of candidates who presented their application decreased by 10 %. In 2014, the proportion of VAE candidates among the total number of candidates obtaining a title was only 3.7 %, the same level as in 2004 when VAE was rolled out (whereas it was almost 10 % in 2007). In general, women are over-represented among candidates who aim to access the professional titles via the VAE process (almost 80 %). AFPA remains the main accredited provider for obtaining a qualification through VAE (DGEFP 2015).

The most attractive titles for VAE candidates are:

- home support worker,
- customer relations advisor,
- cleaning and hygiene agent,
- specialised sales assistant,
- vocational trainer for adults.

Table 9.2 Professional titles receiving the highest number of VAE applications

Source: DGEFP, 2015

	Presented	Admitted	% admitted via VAE	% admitted via training
Home support worker	984	734	74.6 %	78.8 %
Customer relations advisor	163	135	82.8 %	73.0 %
Secretary/assistant	145	95	65.5 %	74.8 %
Sales manager	129	103	79.8 %	79.4 %
Sales employee in retail store	116	86	74.1 %	80.7 %
Cleaning and hygiene agent	111	88	79.3 %	74.9 %
Specialised sales assistant in retail store	107	93	86.9 %	84.5 %
Vocational trainer for adults	105	93	88.6 %	84.0 %
Assistant manager	85	61	71.8 %	77.2 %
Assistant secretary in medical/social institution	84	57	67.9 %	74.1 %

³² *Titres professionnels* are geared towards career development, professional conversions and re-integration on the labour market. They address the needs of individuals who are already out of the school system, whether they are employed, or actively looking for employment. Titles are composed of “blocs of competences” called “Certificats de compétences professionnelles”, CCP). Professional titles cover all sectors and levels of qualification, from level V to level II (ISCED 3 to ISCED 6). See: <http://travail-emploi.gouv.fr/formation-professionnelle/formation-professionnelle-des-demandeurs-d-emploi/titres-professionnels>

nd technical qualifications awarded by the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education and Research (ISCED 3c to 5)³³

In relation to diplomas awarded by the Ministry of Education, in 2014 the number of diplomas awarded through VAE decreased by 3 % compared to 2013. Juries examined 19 000 validation applications for a vocational diploma awarded by the *Education Nationale*. They validated the award of 13 380 diplomas. The decrease also affected the other stages: eligibility and submission of application (DEPP, 2015a).

Overall, VAE still represents a marginal share of the vocational diplomas awarded by the Ministry of education and higher education and research. For example, it represents less than 2 % of all CAP awarded.

The experience and situation of candidates vary significantly depending on the *Académie* where they apply. The length of time to process applications for instance varies greatly: the share of candidates who have been eligible for more than 12 months when their file is examined by the jury is between 10 and 80 %. Each year, the number of eligibility requests increases faster than the number of files submitted. 30 % of eligible candidates would not pursue the application further. This is because the preparation of a portfolio requires substantial time and personal commitment. Unemployed candidates and those with less experience are more likely to drop out.

Overall, demands are still concentrated on a small number of diplomas: three quarters of the files examined cover 5 % of the total number of qualifications accessible through VAE.

One third of applications relate to BTS (Advanced technical diploma, Level III); 18 % to a vocational baccalaureate (Bac Pro, Level IV); 21 % to a CAP (Certificate of professional aptitude, Level V) and 6 % to a Brevet professionnel (BP, Professional certificate).

The childcare diploma “CAP *Petite enfance*” represents 70 % of applications for CAP.

The BP in hairdressing (*Coiffure*) represents almost 80 % of applications to obtain a BP.

Candidates’ success rate varies depending on the diploma. The validation rate varies from 81 % for a vocational baccalaureate to 67 % for a BTS and only 48 % for a BP.

Table 9.3 Number of candidates for the most commonly targeted vocational and technical qualifications, 2013-2014

Qualifications	2013	2014	Share of VAE in total number of qualifications awarded - 2014
CAP Petite enfance (<i>childcare</i>)	3 106	3 003	8.5
Diplôme d'État d'éducateur spécialisé (DEES) (<i>specialist educator</i>)	2 278	2 234	22.2
Diplôme d'État de moniteur éducateur (DEME) (<i>educator-youth worker</i>)	1 113	1 032	17.6
BTS Management des unités commerciales (<i>management of commercial unit</i>)	902	963	4.7
BTS Assistant de direction (<i>assistant manager</i>)	833	817	7.4
Bac professionnel Secrétariat (<i>secretary</i>)	795	782	5.4
Brevet professionnel Coiffure (<i>hairdresser</i>)	816	768	5.8

Source: MENESR DEPP

³³ Includes diplomas of level V to III delivered by the Ministry of Education (CAP, BEP, BAC PRO), some vocational diplomas at higher education level (BTS, DSAA, DCG, DSCG).

Higher education qualifications (ISCED 5-6)

In relation to higher education qualifications, 4 267 people obtained all or part of a degree by VAE in 2014 (DEPP, 2015b) among which 2 275 were received in terms of a full degree.

This first figure represents a 5 % decrease compared to 2013. The professional bachelor (licence pro) was the qualification most frequently awarded (and in 45 % of cases, by direct, total validation). Most of those who obtained this qualification were under 30 years of age.

Since 2014, the Master degree is no longer the main qualification awarded through VAE, but remains the diploma most received in terms of partial validation. Masters are mostly awarded to candidates above 50 years of age.

Table 9.4 Breakdown of VAE beneficiaries by qualification obtained (%), 2014

	Full Validation	Partial Validation
DUT-DEUST-DNTS	3.3	2.6
Licence professionnelle (vocational bachelor)	44.7	27.3
Licence	8.2	6.9
Maîtrise	1.4	3.9
Master	30.5	44.0
Doctorat (PhD)	0.7	0
Diplôme d'ingénieur (Engineer)	2.7	5.3
Other diploma registered in RNCP	8.5	10.0
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: MENESR DEPP (Scope: Universities + CNAM)

The profile of candidates has not changed much since 2011: 40 % of successful candidates were already holding a higher education diploma (bac +2). More than 80 % of successful candidates were employed; only 13 % were unemployed. Managers (*cadres*) remain the main beneficiaries of VAE in HEIs (43 %).

Almost all candidates benefited from support (*accompagnement*).

Twelve years after its implementation, VAE remains relatively little used at higher education level. Overall, 3 % of universities diplomas are awarded through VAE. Discrepancies between universities remain important in terms of the number of files examined. Five universities assessed more than 100 applications, while 9 assessed less than 10 (DEPP, 2015b).

But more than 19 000 applications for validation of prior learning in order to grant access to higher education which includes exemptions of the requisite degree (VAPP 85) were administered by higher education institutions in 2014, and about 13 500 of these procedures were successful. This is a 17 % increase compared to 2013.

In 2011, more than 15 000 VAPP applications were administered, 12 000 were successful.

9.4.3 Validation and migrants / refugees and other disadvantaged groups

There are no specific validation arrangements for migrants or particular target groups.

Data on the profile of users (see Section 9.4) indicates that individuals who are unemployed generally represent less than a third of users (except for qualifications awarded by the Ministry of employment, for which almost 60 % of candidates are unemployed).

The Decree of 12 November 2014 includes new provisions with respect to support for candidates. In addition to a representative of an organisation which is part of the public guidance services giving advice, support can also comprise the following:

- guidance and help to look for funding
- complementary training corresponding to the requirements of the qualification standards, or corresponding to a set of competencies (*bloc de compétence*) missing in the candidates' pathway, that correspond to one part of the qualification standard (Art. 6423.3). This new provision could be helpful for vulnerable groups.

10 Validation methods

The main approach used as part of VAE in France is the portfolio method completed with interviews and debates with a jury. The methods used may vary depending on the provider and the type of qualification targeted (each awarding authority is in charge of defining the methods used).

Identification/documentation phase

The VAE application follows a two-step procedure for all qualifications.

For the registration of applicants in the VAE process, a common application form for the collection of information has been developed between Ministries, which is known as *Livret 1*. This is used for a first eligibility check. A decree establishes a standard model for a "Request for VAE," with all ministries awarding qualifications³⁴. This form is registered by the General Directorate of State Modernisation.

It can be downloaded on most websites of VAE official stakeholders.

The second part of the application is the preparation and submission by the candidate of a **portfolio** identifying and documenting the learning outcomes to be validated (called *Livret 2*). The exact structure and content of this document can vary in content according to the awarding body and the standard requirements of qualifications that are sought; in all cases, it contains a detailed written description of the applicant's knowledge and skills acquired through experience as well as evidence of past professional achievements.

As part of the procedure used at the ministry in charge of employment, the candidate must present a document called *dossier de synthèse de pratiques professionnelles* (DSPP) presenting their professional experience.

Assessment/certification phase

The content and relevance of the portfolio is assessed by the members of an ad-hoc validation jury. The jury meets in the presence of the candidate; this typically includes a presentation by the candidate about his/her experience, an interview with the candidate and debate with jury members. The jury can then decide to award a full or partial validation to the candidate or not to award anything. Other methods can be used as part of the assessment/certification phase (related to the type of learning outcomes to be assessed) such as observation of real or simulated working activities.

As part of the procedure used at the ministry in charge of employment, the assessment includes a simulation of the work environment (called *épreuve de synthèse*) in front of a jury, who is also evaluating the dossier submitted by the candidate. The validation can be total or partial (one or several certificates of professional competences can be awarded) (DARES, 2014).

Traditional tests and examinations are not common practice.

³⁴ See: http://travail-emploi.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/it_951_452_fbb7b.pdf

Delays before candidates can present their case in front of a jury are deemed excessive, in particular for qualifications pertaining to public certification bodies (except qualifications awarded by the Ministry of employment). The Ministry of education is experimenting with a video-conference system for the Baccalauréat (A-levels) which could also apply to VAE candidates. The frequency of validation sessions could thus be increased. It would also be more efficient as it would allow more candidates to take part per session. This can only apply to qualifications not requiring the simulation of a work situation.³⁵

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Country report France

2016 update to the European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning

The 2012 Council recommendation on validation encourages Member States to put in place national arrangements for validation by 2018. These arrangements will enable individuals to increase the visibility and value of their knowledge, skills and competences acquired outside formal education and training: at work, at home or in voluntary activities.

This country report is one of 36 that, together with a synthesis report and thematic reports, constitute the European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning. The inventory is a regularly updated overview of validation practices and arrangements in all Member States, EFTA countries and Turkey. It is a reference point for information on validation in Europe. It is organised around the principles defined in the 2012 Council Recommendation that were further elaborated in the European guidelines for validation. This is its sixth update (2004, 2005, 2008, 2010, 2014 and 2016).



CEDEFOP

European Centre for the Development
of Vocational Training

Europe 123, 570 01 Thessaloniki (Pylea), GREECE
PO Box 22427, 551 02 Thessaloniki, GREECE
Tel. +30 2310490111, Fax +30 2310490020, Email: info@cedefop.europa.eu

[visit our portal www.cedefop.europa.eu](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu)
