

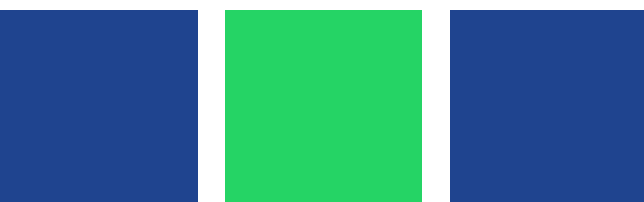
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# IMPLEMENTING EUROPEAN PRIORITIES IN VET

Making national VET agile,  
flexible, innovative, attractive,  
inclusive and quality assured

# FRANCE

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# Implementing European priorities in VET

Making national VET agile, flexible, innovative, attractive,  
inclusive and quality-assured:  
France

**Thematic perspectives** provide national overviews of specific themes in a common format and offer comparative dimension across the EU Member States, Iceland and Norway.

This thematic perspectives series complements the general information on vocational education and training (VET) policies and systems provided in [VET in Europe database](#) and the [Timeline of VET policies in Europe](#). The themes presented in the series feature high on the European agenda.

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# Contents

CHAPTER 1.	Introduction .....	5
CHAPTER 2.	Main policy developments in 2023.....	5
2.1	Agile and resilient VET, adaptive to labour market needs.....	5
2.2	Flexible VET, providing progression and lifelong learning opportunities .....	7
2.3	Innovative and excellent VET .....	8
2.4	Attractive VET, based on modern and digitalised provision .....	10
2.5	Inclusive VET promoting equal opportunities.....	11
2.6	VET underpinned by quality assurance .....	12
CHAPTER 3.	Involvement of VET stakeholders in the implementation of policy developments related to NIP .....	13
CHAPTER 4.	Achievements of implementation.....	14
CHAPTER 5.	Challenges of implementation .....	15
CHAPTER 6.	Conclusions.....	17
References	.....	18

## CHAPTER 1. Introduction

The French national implementation plan (NIP) (European Commission, 2023) is structured around four measure packages, each of which is linked to initial (IVET) and continuing vocational education and training (CVET) measures and several EU priorities:

- (a) Axis 1 - Reinforcing the individualisation of training pathways and making them fluid throughout life is supported through: individualisation of pathways in IVET; and for CVET through the personal training account and career development advice schemes, quality certification of training providers, modularisation of training pathways and recognition of prior learning.
- (b) Axis 2 - Anticipating and supporting ecological and digital transitions: including foresight, transforming diplomas and qualifications, adapting training provision, dedicated funding.
- (c) Axis 3 - Developing all forms of training, particularly work-based and on-the-job training, including apprenticeship.
- (d) Axis 4 - Contributing to equal opportunities in all areas: including for IVET measures to promote gender equality, mentoring, support for young drop-out; for CVET: additional funding for the Personal Training Account targeting specific groups, the fight against illiteracy, preparatory programmes for entry into apprenticeship.

The most important measures are related to the implementation and deepening of the CVET and apprenticeship 2018 reform, and to the ongoing reform of the vocational upper secondary school.

The initiatives presented here for 2023 are not exhaustive and represent the most important ones. Links to related policies described in the Cedefop on-line database, [Timeline of VET policies in Europe](#) (Cedefop, & ReferNet, 2023) are provided as hyperlinks.

## CHAPTER 2. Main policy developments in 2023

### 2.1 Agile and resilient VET, adaptive to labour market needs

The two main measures relevant to this priority are the reform of the upper secondary vocational schools, the initiatives described below relating to NIP Axis 1 and 2; and the development of apprenticeship, corresponding to the NIP Axis 3.

The reform of the vocational upper secondary pathway has been gradually rolled out since the start of the 2023/24 school year, with new ambitions to combat early school leaving and improve the success of IVET learners in continuing their studies and their integration into the world of work. Several of the measures taken contribute to a VET, agile and resilient, adaptive to labour market needs:

- (a) The opening of a liaison office between schools and businesses (*Bureau des entreprises*) in each VET school aims to enhance the connections between education and the business world and foster stronger partnerships with companies (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Jeunesse & Direction Générale de l'Enseignement Scolaire, 2024a, March).
- (b) Reorganisation of the curriculum in the final year of upper secondary vocational

school with more [individualised learning paths](#) (Cedefop, & ReferNet, 2023): a differentiated 6-week pathway at the end of the school year depending on each pupil's plans, further study or access to employment (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Jeunesse & Direction Générale de l'Enseignement Scolaire, 2024b, March).

(c) [Strengthening general knowledge and key skills](#) (Cedefop, & ReferNet, 2023) through:

- (i) the reinforcement of general teaching in French, mathematics and history-geography from the start of the school year 2024/25 and teaching in small groups (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Jeunesse, 2023b, December);
- (ii) the development of key competences: pupils can choose optional activities to help them acquire key competences, e.g. practicing an art, introduction to digital creation, entrepreneurship, public speaking (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Jeunesse & Direction Générale de l'Enseignement Scolaire, 2024, March; Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Jeunesse & Direction Générale de l'Enseignement Scolaire, 2023, July 10).

(d) [Anticipating and facilitating ecological and digital transitions](#) (Cedefop, & ReferNet, 2023) through:

- (i) the review of the regional vocational training map in line with economic and ecological needs <sup>(1)</sup>. The aim of this review is to replace the range of vocational training courses, the results of which, professional integration or further studies, are insufficient, in favour of more promising courses that meet the skills needs of each region. This new approach is based on longer-term strategic projections, of 3 to 5 years, rather than the annual updates previously used. In terms of skills intelligence, this review uses a management tool based on the measurement of the performance of each vocational course to facilitate decision-making using cross-referenced data such as figures of enrolments, success rates, further study, results in terms of professional integration and added value (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Jeunesse & Direction Générale de l'Enseignement Scolaire, 2023a, November);
- (ii) the creation of 40 new qualifications (EQF levels 3, 4 and 5) to meet employment needs linked to ecological, digital and demographic transitions (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Jeunesse & Direction Générale de l'Enseignement Scolaire, 2024, January).

The [development of apprenticeship](#) (Cedefop, & ReferNet, 2023) continued with a record number of apprentices exceeding 1 million in 2023 (1 017 500 apprentices in October 2023, + 6.2% in one year) (Ministère du Travail, de la Santé et des Solidarités & Direction de l'Animation de la Recherche, des Etudes et des Statistiques, 2024, March 29).

The aid paid by the State to companies recruiting apprentices was renewed for 2023, with

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<sup>(1)</sup> This map lists the vocational training courses offered in schools at regional level. It is the joint responsibility of the regions (responsible for the economic development of their territory) and the education authorities.

a flat rate of EUR 6 000 for the first year of the contract, regardless of the age of the apprentice.

## 2.2 Flexible VET, providing progression and lifelong learning opportunities

The flagship measure relevant to this priority is the 2022 [reform of the validation prior learning scheme](#) (*Validation des acquis de l'expérience*, VAE) (Cedefop, & ReferNet, 2023), which corresponds to the NIP Axis 1 (Bridges between different forms of lifelong learning).

The reform aims to increase the number of those undertaking a VAE process to have their skills validated towards the acquisition of a professional qualification as well as their success rates (100 000 new beneficiaries per year targeted by 2027). The new system is based on the creation of a public service of the VAE and defines more flexible conditions of access, the possibility of partial accreditation of a [skill set](#) (Cedefop, & ReferNet, 2023) of an RNCP qualification and an extended period of training leave from work for those engaging in the VAE. A decree published in December 2023 implements the new provisions for VAE courses starting in 2024 (Ministère du Travail, du Plein Emploi et de l'Insertion, 2023b) (see Table 1 below).

Table 1. **VAE scheme changes**

	Before the 2022 reform	As from 2024
<b>Objective</b>	Acquisition of a vocational <b>qualification</b> registered in the National Register of Vocational Qualifications (RNCP)	Acquisition of a vocational <b>qualification</b> registered in the RNCP or a <b>skill set</b> from such a qualification
<b>Beneficiaries</b>	VAE is open to people with <b>one year's experience in the workforce</b> . The education code <b>lists the types of experience</b> eligible for VAE applications.	VAE is open to anyone with proof of an <b>activity directly related to the content of the qualification</b> in question.
<b>Support</b>	Candidates are offered support once <b>their application has been accepted</b> .	Candidates are offered support <b>from the moment they submit their application</b> .
<b>Training (VAE) leave</b>	VAE leave is limited to <b>24 hours</b> .	VAE leave can last up to <b>48 hours</b> .

Source: Ministère du Travail, du Plein Emploi et de l'Insertion (2023b)

In order to promote access to vocational qualifications and integration in sectors where there is a shortage of skilled workers, the law also provides for a three-year trial of alternance training under a [professionalisation contract](#) (one of the two apprenticeship schemes in France, open to adults) combined with VAE. This type of 'reverse' VAE offers on-the-job training and skills recognition through a professionalisation contract, leading to acquisition of a vocational qualification. The VAE scheme is therefore no longer based solely on the candidate's previous experience but is also linked to his or her professional career plan (Ministère du Travail, du Plein Emploi et de l'Insertion, 2023a).

An experiment (REVA), aiming to simplify and speed up the VAE process for the beneficiaries, was extended from September 2022 to June 2023. It focused on 19 short-staffed

occupations in the health and social care, early childhood and social economy sectors (Ministère du Travail, de la Santé et des Solidarités, 2023, June).

The two measures described below are also linked to Axis 1 of the NIP: modularisation of training pathways through skill sets in vocational qualifications; and a personal training account (individual learning account scheme).

In order to make access to qualifications more flexible through modules corresponding to **skill sets** (Cedefop, & ReferNet, 2023), France Compétences <sup>(2)</sup> has launched a project to develop bridges between vocational qualifications, particularly at the level of skill sets <sup>(3)</sup>. The project involves the ministries and other certifying bodies (France compétences, 2022, December 15).

From May 2023, the **personal training account** (CPF) platform (Cedefop, & ReferNet, 2023) incorporates a pre-activated guidance, training and skills passport for all active workers, enabling them to create an online CV with pre-populated data certified by a trustworthy third party, Caisse des dépôts <sup>(4)</sup>, which manages the PTA platform (Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations, 2024, April).

As part of Axis 4 of the NIP, increasing the personal training account entitlements for certain target groups, employees exposed to occupational risks benefit from enhanced rights to training funding, thanks to a professional prevention account (*Compte professionnel de prévention*, C2P). Two decrees issued in August 2023 set out the procedures for using the C2P and covering training costs (Ministère de la Santé et de la Prévention, 2023a and 2023b).

Also related to Axis 4 of the NIP (Measures to help people enter training) the social partners have developed a new management skills certificate, *Cléa Management*, in addition to the two core skills certificates they had already created (*Cléa and Cléa numérique*) (Certif Pro, 2023, February).

The aim of this unique reference framework of basic management skills is to take account of changes in managerial practices and new challenges in terms of work organisation, skills development and support for career paths. The *CléA Management* certificate is in the process of applying for its registration as a recognised qualification in the specific directory (*répertoire spécifique*, RS) of the **national register of professional qualifications** (*répertoire national des certifications professionnelles*, RNCP) <sup>(5)</sup>.

## 2.3 Innovative and excellent VET

All measures described in this section are related to Axis 2 of the NIP.

With regard to both initial and continuing vocational training, a call for expressions of interest named **Future skills and jobs** (*Compétences et métiers d'avenir*, CMA) (Cedefop, & ReferNet, 2023) is part of the France 2030 plan <sup>(6)</sup>. This initiative aims to enable the acquisition of the skills required for the jobs of the future in France in 2030 by funding of skills

<sup>(2)</sup> The vocational training regulatory and funding authority for CVET and apprenticeship.

<sup>(3)</sup> Each of the vocational qualifications registered in the national registry of professional qualifications (RNCP) is divided into such skill sets, also defined as blocks of competences.

<sup>(4)</sup> *Caisse des dépôts et consignations* is a Deposit and Consignment Fund, a public financial institution that manages various savings and investments and provides funding for public projects.

<sup>(5)</sup> The Specific directory registers certifications and accreditations corresponding to additional professional skills.

<sup>(6)</sup> France 2030 is a national recovery and investment plan endowed with EUR 54 billion. France Stratégie, IGF - Inspectorate-General of Finance (2022, December).

diagnostics projects and specific training programmes.

The first season of the CMA (December 2021 to March 2023) led to the completion of 59 skills diagnostics and the funding of 116 training programmes, providing training for 3.1 million learners. 14 new winning projects were presented in June 2023, aiming to train 620 000 more people by 2030 and raise the awareness of 1.3 million people about the challenges of green industries.

The CMA makes it possible to co-finance, alongside the regions, companies and academic authorities, the renewal of technical facilities in IVET colleges, the training of teaching staff as well as new training courses, with a specific focus on the transformation of the initial vocational training map (see Section 2.1).

The transformation of the vocational training provision (changes in curricula of existing programmes and provision of new programmes) is being worked on as part of a network of VET schools and providers. The [Trades and qualifications campuses](#) label (*Campus des Métiers et des Qualifications*) (Cedefop, & ReferNet, 2023) represents an effective way of cooperating and promoting excellence. In addition, the *lycée des métiers* label has been renewed: from the start of the 2023/24 academic year, the label should also be awarded to a network of VET schools (in addition to one-to-one schools) to encourage collective initiatives, regardless of the sector of activity and the territory (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Jeunesse, & Direction Générale de l'Enseignement Scolaire, 2023, October; Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Jeunesse, & Direction Générale de l'Enseignement Scolaire, 2023a, November).

The FEEBAT programme, launched in 2007 and running until 2025, continued in 2023 and aims to better integrate energy-saving issues into the initial and continuing training of professionals in the building sector, including [teachers and trainers](#) (Cedefop, & ReferNet, 2023). It brings together various players, including ministries, associations, professional organisations and the French agency for ecological transition (ADEME) (Formation rénovation énergétique, FEEBAT, 2024, April).

With regard to the transformation of CVET for the [ecological transition](#), the Employment Skills Network <sup>(7)</sup>, run by the strategic planning body *France stratégie* <sup>(8)</sup>, has focused its 2023-24 work programme on the impact of the ecological transition on employment and skills (France Stratégie, 2024, January). The analysis conducted in this context concerns, for example, forecasting the employment and training needs associated with the energy renovation of buildings by 2030 (France Stratégie, Diagne, Flamand, Tranier, & Blanc, 2023, September).

As it does every year, *France Compétences*, published a list of 29 particularly evolving or emerging occupations for 2024, with the aim of speeding up the registration of corresponding vocational qualifications in the national register of professional qualifications (France compétences, 2024, February).

Initiatives are also being taken by civil society players to support the transformation of training in response to socio-ecological issues: for example, the association The shift project

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<sup>(7)</sup> The Employment Skills Network (*Réseau Emploi Compétences*) brings together representatives of public institutions and players in the fields of economic development, employment, vocational training and guidance.

<sup>(8)</sup> France Stratégie is a government institution in France that provides strategic analysis and recommendations to support decision-making by public authorities.

promotes and supports the integration of socio-ecological issues into higher education and engineering training courses (The Shift Project & Amichaud, 2023, May).

## 2.4 Attractive VET, based on modern and digitalised provision

In link with Axis 1 of the NIP (Measures to strengthen the individualisation of pathways in initial vocational training), short specialisation initial VET programmes are being promoted to make it easier for upper secondary education VET graduates with a medium level qualification to enter the world of work.

These one-year vocational training programmes allow [upper secondary VET](#) students, holders of a professional skills certificate (CAP, EQF level 3) or a vocational baccalaureate (EQF level 4) to obtain a specialised qualification, valued in the labour market, which can be prepared under school or apprentice status. A target of 20 000 places in this type of specialised complementary one-year training (*Bac+1*) has been set for the start of the 2026/27 academic year (4 500 existing places in 2022-23) (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Jeunesse, & Direction Générale de l'Enseignement Scolaire, 2023b, November).

In the context of Axis 2 of the NIP, adapting training provision to local areas, the [Trades and qualifications campuses](#) label (Cedefop, & ReferNet, 2023) has been gaining strength as Centres of Vocational Excellence ([CoVEs](#)) partners: among the 13 winners of the CoVEs 2022 call for projects (announced in June 2023), the trades and qualification campuses are partners in four CoVEs.

In link with Axis 3 of the NIP, systemic reform of apprenticeships, to support the development of [European and international mobility](#) (Cedefop, & ReferNet, 2023) for learners in alternance training programmes, IVET apprentices and those enrolled in CVET programmes through a professionalisation contract, a bill for an Erasmus+ for apprentices was adopted in December 2023 (Le Parlement français, 2023). The new law gives the employer more flexibility to manage the employment contract during mobility, allowing him to choose whether the contract is suspended or whether the trainee is on secondment while abroad (with the employer retaining responsibility for working conditions, pay and social rules).

An agreement between France and Germany was signed in July 2023 to develop cross-border apprenticeships (Ministère du Travail, de la Santé et des Solidarités, 2023, July 21).

In conjunction with the promotion of excellence and the internationalisation of IVET, a national media campaign was launched to promote the national finals of the WorldSkills competition that attracted in September 2023 800 competitors from 69 trades and 40 000 young visitors in Lyon, also hosting the WorldSkills Lyon 2024 global competition.

Among the other measures related to this EU priority, the ministry of national education and youth has taken new initiatives to better address [teacher shortages and attract and retain qualified teachers](#) (Cedefop, & ReferNet, 2023). One of these initiatives is a pact for voluntary teachers announced in September 2022 as a way of increasing teacher pay. This pact enables teachers to take on new tasks, on a voluntary and paid basis, to promote success and better support for pupils (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Jeunesse, 2023, October).

## 2.5 Inclusive VET promoting equal opportunities

The measures described below are related to Axis 4 of the NIP.

At national education level, a social and school [diversity plan](#) (Cedefop, & ReferNet, 2023) was announced in May 2023 by the Ministry of national education and youth (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Jeunesse, 2023, July). The aim is to increase the social mix in public schools by organising a consultation in each academic region with local authorities and partners to set objectives and actions that will be implemented between 2024 and 2027. The aim is to reduce the social segregation of state schools by 20% by 2027, including in upper secondary VET programmes.

The [reform of the vocational upper secondary schools](#) (Cedefop, & ReferNet, 2023) provides for students to receive a financial bonus from the State for every internship they undertake as part of their course, with a progressive amount depending on the year of training (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Jeunesse, 2023, May).

- (a) 50 euros per week of placement for first-year CAP students (EQF level 3) and second-year vocational baccalaureate (EQF level 4) students;
- (b) 75 euros per week of placement for second-year CAP students and first-year vocational baccalaureate students;
- (c) 100 euros per week of placement for final-year vocational baccalaureate students.

Three new schemes aim to prevent the [risk of early leaving from education and training](#) (Cedefop, & ReferNet, 2023) during and after the upper secondary school education:

*Tous droits ouverts* (TDO) is a new coordinated approach to the prevention of early school leaving is based on the mobilisation of all local players involved in the support, integration, training and employment of young people. It has been implemented from the start of the 2023 school year to support the work of educational and teaching teams with the most vulnerable pupils, with priority being given to those in vocational upper secondary schools. (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Jeunesse, & Direction Générale de l'Enseignement Scolaire, 2023).

*Ambition emploi* is a new support programme designed for early leavers. This school-based programme lasts a maximum of four months. It provides support within the school in conjunction with the public employment services and offers young people the opportunity to retain their pupil status (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Jeunesse, 2023, July 18).

*Parcours de consolidation* is a new initiative, part of a set of 12 measures introduced in 2023 in the framework of the VET school reform. It is designed for those preparing the advanced technician certificate (Brevet de Technicien Supérieur, BTS, EQF 5 level), which is the most common option for continuing post-baccalaureate studies. This pathway provides personalised support and, if necessary, an additional year of preparation for the diploma in 3 years instead of 2. It has been piloted in 2022-23 and will be rolled out across the board from the start of the 2024 academic year (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Jeunesse, 2024, March).

Mentoring in upper secondary vocational schools is being developed to [better prepare students for the world of work](#) (Cedefop, & ReferNet, 2023), thanks to external partnerships (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Jeunesse, & Direction Générale de l'Enseignement

Scolaire, 2023, February).

At CVET level, the [fight against illiteracy](#) (Cedefop, & ReferNet, 2023) is deploying new tools with the establishment in 2023 of a National Observatory of Illiteracy and Illectronicism ('illelectronicism' refers to the lack of digital skills) within the National Agency for the Fight Against Illiteracy (ANLCI). The aim of this observatory is to produce annual statistics on illiteracy and illectronicism to guide the deployment of public policies by the State and local authorities (Ministère du Travail, de la Santé et des Solidarités, 2023, September 8)

The ANLCI has created [Les Incontournables](#), a toolkit for use by companies, the skills operators (OPCOs) <sup>(9)</sup> and training organisations. The toolkit aims at enabling them to help employees suffering from illiteracy and illectronicism to access training and secure their career paths (ANLCI, n.d.).

In July 2023, an interministerial committee for the overseas territories decided on new measures to combat illiteracy in the French overseas territories, with the aim of systematically detecting illiteracy, developing new training opportunities and organising an illiteracy resource centre (CRI) in each territory (Comité interministériel des Outre-mer, 2023, July 18).

The CARIF-OREF network <sup>(10)</sup> has been implementing in 2023-24 a plan for the [ongoing professional development of staff](#) at apprenticeship training centres (CFA). The plan aims at supporting the CFAs in their missions as defined by the Labour Code. It is based on the deployment of resource kits and webinars, which cover topics such as gender equality and apprentices with disabilities.

A guide on apprenticeships and disability has been published by the Ministry of Labour. The guide aims to inform all stakeholders and raise awareness of the opportunities offered by specific apprenticeship contracts (*contrats aménagés*) adapted for learners with disabilities. The duration of the training and all stages of the apprentice's career can be adapted to compensate for the consequences of a disability (Ministère du Travail, de la Santé et des Solidarités, 2023, October 27).

The association Abilympics France, which aims to develop the participation of disabled people in all craft competitions in France and abroad, organised the [tenth session](#) of the Abilympics competition in March 2023 in Metz (Abilympics France, 2023).

## 2.6 VET underpinned by quality assurance

The measures described below are related to Axis 1 of the NIP.

With regard to the [personal training account](#) (CPF) (individual learning account scheme), the regulation of eligible training provision has been strengthened with the introduction of a law to combat abusive commercial advertising and fraud, adopted in December 2022.

As of 2022, the public body Caisse des Dépôts <sup>(11)</sup> that manages the CPF scheme has introduced a series of regulatory measures to better control the training offer registered on the CPF marketplace platform. Stricter control of the registered training providers has reduced

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<sup>(9)</sup> There are 11 OPCOs that are joint bodies organised by professional sectors, managed by the social partners, which distribute funds for training and support skills anticipation in SMEs.

<sup>(10)</sup> Training resource and information centres (CARIF); regional employment and training observatories (OREF)

<sup>(11)</sup> *Caisse des dépôts et consignations* (Deposit and Consignment Fund) is a public financial institution that manages various savings and investments and provides funding for public projects.

their number from more than 25 500 in 2019 to less than 15 000 by the end of 2023 (Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations, 2023, November). Among the most significant regulatory measures taken to clean up the catalogue of CPF-eligible training programmes is the requirement, implemented as of 2022, for training organisations to obtain accreditation from the certifier responsible for delivering the vocational qualification. Additionally, training providers are mandated to attain quality certification through the *Qualiopi* quality certificate. In addition, France Compétences, which is responsible for the Specific directory (*Répertoire spécifique*)<sup>(12)</sup>, has also carried out a major update of this directory, which has led to the non-renewal of a large proportion of the certifications previously listed in it.

A decree on the application of this law was published in December 2023, with the aim, in particular to define a maximum level of subcontracting of the training courses sold on the CPF marketplace platform by training providers (Ministère du Travail, du Plein Emploi et de l'Insertion, 2023c).

Regarding the [quality label Qualiopi](#) (Cedefop, & ReferNet, 2023) for the certification of training providers, a decree adopted in May 2023 contains a series of measures aimed at strengthening the quality assurance of the certification system. In particular, it specifies the procedure to be followed by auditors in the auditing of training organisations applying for the label - initial audit, follow-up audit and surveillance audit - and the harmonisation of auditing practices between certification bodies (Ministère du Travail, de la Santé et des Solidarités, 2023, June 14).

## CHAPTER 3. Involvement of VET stakeholders in the implementation of policy developments related to NIP

Four categories of players play a role in public education and vocational training policies in France: the State, the Regions, employer organisations and employee trade unions. Their role and involvement vary according to the different measures related to the NIP.

Overall, the governance differs according to the sub-system concerned: IVET is mainly managed by the Ministry for National Education and the Ministry for Higher Education; apprenticeship and CVET depend on the Ministry for Labour and are organised and financed by the France Compétences agency. The board of France Compétences is made up of the four categories of players mentioned above, with the State predominating in decision-making.

Initial vocational education and training has a long history of cooperation with the business world; the measures mentioned in section 2.1, including the opening in 2023 of a liaison office between schools and businesses (*Bureau des entreprises*) in vocational upper secondary schools, are designed to further strengthen the links between educational establishments and local businesses.

As far as initial career guidance is concerned, the 2018 reform gave regional councils new powers: to provide students with information on careers, jobs and training <sup>(13)</sup>. This new role

<sup>(12)</sup> The Specific Directory lists authorisations and vocational certifications corresponding to transversal skills, skills complementary to a profession and clearances (such as, security certificates).

<sup>(13)</sup> Regional councils are elected and have powers defined as part of a decentralisation process, including those relating to the economic development of the territory and since 2014 powers to train certain groups of the public.

for the Regions in an area that used to be the exclusive domain of the national education system means that new responsibilities must be shared. Five years after the implementation of the reform, three out of four Regions organise activities during guidance hours in upper secondary schools, including VET schools.

As far as apprenticeships and continuing vocational training are concerned, the role of the regions and the social partners has been significantly transformed since the 2018 reform.

Moreover, the liberalisation of the creation of apprenticeship training centres (*Centres de formation d'apprentis*, CFA) and the apprenticeship training on offer has been achieved at the expense of the powers of the regions, which until 2018 were responsible for deciding on the map of regional apprenticeship training provision. Companies have largely taken up the idea of creating their own CFA.

The role of the social partners has also been reduced since 2018. They are currently responsible for the joint management of mutualised funds for companies with fewer than 50 employees, and those used by the Career transition associations (*Transition professionnelles*) managing the funding of a specific retraining scheme for employees facing career transition (*project de transition professionnelle*, PTP) to access training leave for professional retraining.

## CHAPTER 4. Achievements of implementation

At IVET level, more individualised vocational pathways have been made possible thanks to additional guidance gradually introduced in recent years, better support and greater flexibility in courses to suit each young person's learning and career perspectives.

The attractiveness of the vocational route is showing positive results, with enrolments in school-based VET rising in 2023 (+ 1.8% compared with 2022), unlike the trends of previous years. Along the same line, in 2023, the number of students leaving the vocational stream during the course of their training has fallen for the first time in three years (representing almost one student in four at the end of the first year of a CAP and just under one student in eight at the end of the second or first year) (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Jeunesse; Direction de l'Évaluation, de la Prospective et de la Performance (DEPP); Dauphin, Dieusaert, Juzdzewski, & Miconnet, 2023, December).

The adaptation of the training offer to the needs of the regions and to the new challenges arising from the socioeconomic context in each region has resulted in the renovation since 2019 of more than 100 vocational diplomas and the creation by 2023 of 40 new diplomas (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Jeunesse, 2023a, December). IVET courses offered by public upper secondary vocational schools are being thoroughly overhauled to better meet local economic and environmental needs (see Section 2.1), with the aim of transforming a quarter of the courses by 2026 (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Jeunesse, & Direction Générale de l'Enseignement Scolaire, 2023a, November).

In terms of apprenticeship training, following the 2018 reform and its liberalisation, apprenticeship has reached record levels with the number of apprentices set to exceed one million by the end of 2023, compared with 360 000 in 2019.

Tertiary education apprentices continue to dominate apprenticeship numbers as 61% of

them were preparing in 2023 for qualifications at EQF level 5 and above <sup>(14)</sup>. The recent growth in apprenticeship is stronger in tertiary education than for vocational qualifications at EQF levels 3 and 4 and is mainly driven by business schools and other private training bodies (Ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche, 2023).

Combined with this momentum in favour of apprenticeships, the more flexible opening of CFAs and the recognition of company CFAs have resulted in an expansion of the training bodies from 954 CFAs in operation before the 2018 law to 3 440 CFAs by the end of 2023. Growth has been particularly marked in certain sectors, such as sport, medical-social care and services. The number of CFAs has also increased significantly in the French overseas territories.

At CVET level, since its launch in November 2019, the personal training account (CFA) platform has been a real public success and has helped to fund training for 7 million people in the 4 years of its existence. The number of training courses funded through the CFAs has risen from 630 000 in 2019 to 1.3 million in 2023 (Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations, 2023, October). The CFA has succeeded in correcting the inequalities in access that have long existed in the field of continuing vocational training. By 2022, jobseekers were the main beneficiaries of the CFA (29%), followed by white-collar workers (26%) and blue-collar workers (15%), far ahead of managers and higher intellectual professionals (11%), who otherwise benefit from more frequent training opportunities provided by their employer (France compétences, 2023).

Among the most popular training courses, the category B driving licence and support for entrepreneurs account for almost one in three requests. The most popular certifications are the TOEIC professional language certification and office automation certifications for the use of Excel and similar software (Ministère de l'Économie, des Finances et de la Souveraineté industrielle et numérique, 2023).

## CHAPTER 5. Challenges of implementation

At IVET level, there has been an increase in the number of vocational learners continuing their studies in tertiary education (EQF 5 and above). In 2022, 45.9% of VET students who graduated from upper secondary vocational schools continued their studies, compared with 92.6% of general baccalaureate holders and 80.7% of technological baccalaureate holders (INSEE, 2022).

Success rates of BTS (higher technician VET programmes, delivering the higher technical certificate, EQF level 5) graduates heavily varies depending on the type of studies previously completed. Only 54% of vocational baccalaureate holders enrolled in BTS programmes will receive (after two or three years) their technical certificate, against those with a general (86% success rate) or technological (63% success rates) baccalaureate enrolled in BTS programmes. With most of the VET cohort 2020 that graduated in 2023 (80%) preparing to enter BTS programmes, this trend needs attention (Ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche, 2024).

IVET is still highly gendered, with girls accounting for only 41% of all students in upper

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<sup>(14)</sup> Apprenticeship, which in France is one of the possible routes to a vocational qualification, is thus also present in tertiary education.

secondary vocational (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Jeunesse, Direction de l'Évaluation, de la Prospective et de la Performance, 2023a).

The attractiveness of the teaching profession remains a major issue, with persistent recruitment difficulties. A cohort of students surveyed by the Cour des Comptes in 2022 identified three main factors that they felt made teaching unattractive: inadequate pay, working conditions and lack of recognition (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Jeunesse, Direction de l'Évaluation, de la Prospective et de la Performance, 2023b; Cour des comptes, 2022, May).

The project to establish equivalences between modules of vocational qualifications corresponding to skill sets (see 2.2) has proved complex and has not been completed as quickly as expected. One of the difficulties encountered is related to the high number of vocational qualifications registered in the national register (RNCP) <sup>(15)</sup>.

The market logic driving the growth of the personal training account (CPF) and of apprenticeship, with the commercial interest of training providers as one of the factors driving the development of these schemes, requires major regulatory efforts to frame and control their pedagogical and commercial practices.

Over 15 000 training organisations were registered on the CPF platform as of August 2023, offering just over 185 000 different training programmes. The General Delegation for Employment and Vocational Training (DGEFP) and the Caisse des dépôts developed a strategy to address the cases of fraud that had increased in particular from 2020 to 2022. This strategy focuses on introducing greater selectivity and control over training providers and the training courses they sell before they are published on the CPF platform.

The December 2022 law (Le Parlement français, 2022), which bans individual commercial canvassing, is an attempt to put a stop to sales practices that developed during the first three years of the scheme's existence, leading to large-scale scam campaigns, the promotion of training courses on social networks by influencers, the promise of gifts or compensation for enrolment, etc. In addition to the scams that have been tackled and the ban on individual canvassing, there remains a grey area of training courses sold through the PTA scheme, where, cost and quality, as well as relevance to the buyer can also be an issue, especially for 100% distance learning courses.

To regulate the apprenticeship market, two main levers are the requirement for the training providers to lead to an RNCP-registered vocational qualification and to be certified with the Qualiopi quality label (see Section 2.6). However, quality of teaching in the apprenticeship training centers and in-company assignments for apprentices remain an issue. The Ministry of Labour has begun work to reduce drop-out rates.

Certain practices of private higher education providers have also been highlighted as problematic. In 2023, 69% of the apprenticeship offers listed on the *parcoursup* platform <sup>(16)</sup>, came from private higher education establishments. In 2022, the Directorate-General for Competition, Consumer Affairs and Fraud Control (DGCCRF) warned of the 'misleading commercial practices' of certain establishments (Comité éthique et scientifique de *Parcoursup*, 2024, March).

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<sup>(15)</sup> About 5 000 qualifications are registered in the RNCP.

<sup>(16)</sup> The access platform to higher education, where students register their wishes for further studies.

The strong growth in apprenticeships raises questions in terms of the sustainability of related expenditure. The Inspectorate General of Finances noted that, with a 160% increase in the total number of new apprenticeship contracts between 2018 and 2022, the corresponding expenditure by France Compétences would amount to EUR10.3 billion in 2023, exceeding the dedicated tax resources. (Inspection Générale des Finances, Lepetit, Verdier, Blaison, Inspection Générale des Affaires Sociales, Le Bayon, & Schapira, 2023, July).

The Court of Auditors noted that the growth in apprenticeships, which mainly focus on young people preparing for qualifications at EQF level 5 and above, has not benefited the majority of young people experiencing the most difficulties entering the labour market (Cour des comptes, 2023, July).

With no limit to the funding of apprenticeships and the CPF, the financial resources remaining to support companies and individuals through economic change and career transitions are proportionately reduced.

Schemes for long-term training for occupational change remain at a low level. Only 60 000 workers benefit each year from funding for retraining through long-term training leading to a recognised vocational qualification. However, the situation of having to face a job change is much more common, as 1.4 million job changes are measured each year (France Stratégie, Bouvart, & Donne, 2023, June).

## CHAPTER 6. Conclusions

The French NIP aims to personalise and streamline lifelong learning pathways, with a focus on supporting ecological and digital transitions, expanding work-linked training and promoting equal opportunities.

Key policy developments in 2023 include the reform of upper secondary vocational education and the expansion of apprenticeships, with a particular focus on ecological and digital transitions. The personal training account scheme has gained popularity. Overall, challenges remain with regard to market regulation, sustainable financing and the quality of training.

Efforts to make vocational education and training a path of excellence have received significant investment, bridging the gap with the business world. However, continued efforts are needed to build on the changes achieved.

With full employment as the government's goal, both initial and continuing training are crucial for coping with labour market tensions and adapting to new jobs linked to technological, ecological and demographic changes.

At the level of employment policies linked to training, a major reform of the Public Employment Service has been launched in 2023. Supporting seniors in their second career phase has become crucial, especially with the increase in the retirement age. In 2023, the social partners have started new national negotiations to improve access to vocational training for seniors, retraining possibilities and the improvement of existing training schemes. With a view to possibly signing an agreement in 2024, the translation of these negotiations into law would then depend on parliamentary approval.

The ongoing rationalisation of the CVET system may also require adjustments at the level of the qualifications framework (development of equivalence gateways between skills blocks

of qualifications) and improved quality assurance measures.

The future of the personal training account (CPF) may be subject to reorganisation in the future, depending on discussions about eligible activities and remaining costs to be borne by users. Similarly, apprenticeship funding could be adjusted, taking into account the funding paid to apprenticeship training centres and financial incentives for employers, depending on the vocational qualification pursued.

The post-2018 reform of the CVET and apprenticeship system requires long-term financial sustainability while respecting key principles.

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