European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning 2010
Country Report: Belgium (Wallonia)

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# Update to the European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning
## Country Report: Belgium (Wallonia)

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1 NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON VALIDATION

The issue of validation of non-formal and informal learning is now well-established on the public policy agenda in Belgium, where initiatives have been developed in recent years in the context of a wider drive to improve access to Lifelong Learning. Responsibility for lifelong learning is shared between the Communities (Flemish, French-speaking and German-speaking), the Regions (Flemish Region or Flanders and Walloon Region or Wallonia) and the social partners. Formal legal frameworks for validation have been put in place in both the French and Dutch speaking parts of the country.

The concept of validation adopted in both communities relates mainly to vocational skills (gained through informal learning) although it does allow for the recognition of skills gained outside work in, for example, voluntary activities. The scope of validation and recognition of non-formal and informal skills is not currently as broad as that set in place by the most recent French legislation on the Validation des Acquis de l’Expérience, in so far as it will not cover such a wide range of qualifications or form the basis for the award of full diplomas or qualifications.

As such, the Belgian Federal government plays little role in the detailed development and implementation of policies in the field. Where the recognition of skills impinges on employment policy, there is a shared competence with the Federal Government. Federal legislation may therefore intervene if the issue of validation affects the relationship between the employee and the employer. For example, the Federal Government must decide which categories of employees have the right to follow a validation procedure during working hours and the frequency with which this may occur. The Federal Government also makes decisions regarding access to regulated occupations and determines the conditions necessary to that end1.

Since 1985, private-sector employees have had a right to paid training leave (Congé-Education PayéBetaald Educatief Verlof) of up to 180 hours per academic year to undertake work-related training, providing certain basic conditions are met. Since 2006 the ceiling has been lowered to 120 hours per year2. The training must be related to the individual’s job and fulfill a number of other criteria set down by the relevant legislation. If not related to the current employment the ceiling is 100 hours per year. Public sector employees have a similar right to training leave, although subject to different rules and in their case referred to as Congé Formation / Opleidingsverlof. At the end of 2006 a decree was introduced (the Arrêté Royal du 10/11/2006) which integrated the validation of competences into the right to paid training leave.

A Federal law on the bilan de compétences (individual record of achievement) was passed in December 2001 and, following the approval of implementation legislation, officially entered into force in September 2002. This legislation grants every worker a right to a bilan de compétences and to be assessed to identify and validate skills gained outside the formal education system. At the end of 2006 a decree was introduced (the Arrêté Royal 10/11/2006) which integrated the validation of competences into the right to paid training leave.

1 Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2007, Recognition of informal and non-formal learning in Flanders (Belgium)
2 See http://www.emploi.belgique.be/defaultTab.aspx?id=536#
1.1 National legal framework, system or policy on validation

There are two frameworks that allow recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning in French-speaking Belgium: Valorisation des Acquis de l'Expérience - VAE3 (credit for knowledge gained through experience) and Validation des compétences professionnelles - VCP (credit for occupational skills already mastered).

VAE and VCP are different in several ways, especially with regard to their methodologies, objectives, and the issues involved. In particular, it is important to make the distinction between the two concepts of “valorisation” (to enhance prior experience, in view of obtaining access to academic training) and “validation” which gives access to a recognised title or certification.

Vocational training and VCP

In French-speaking Belgium, debate about the validation of non-formal and informal learning has centred on the concept of validation of competences and valorisation of prior knowledge, within the framework of a bilan de compétences or individual record of achievement. The law grants every worker a right to be assessed to identify and validate skills gained outside the formal education system. Although the law on the bilan de compétences was due to enter into force towards the end of 2002, the need to develop appropriate validation and assessment structures meant that the system was not operational until the beginning of 2004.

On July 24 2003, a Cooperation Agreement was signed between the authorities of the French-speaking part of Belgium (Walloon Region, the French Community and the French Community Commission), relating to the validation of skills in the field of continuous vocational training. The cooperation agreement was formalised through three decrees adopted by the authorities concerned at the end of 2003 and the beginning of 2004.

This Cooperation Agreement aims, primarily, at implementing mechanisms which will allow for skills acquired by individuals through experiences in daily life, at work or during vocational training to be recognised. The policy has been developed by a Consortium of the five most important public sector training providers in French-speaking Belgium:

- FOREM (the Walloon Employment and Vocational Training Service, equivalent to the Flemish VDAB);
- Bruxelles Formation (Public sector training agency in the Brussels-Capital region);
- Enseignement de Promotion Sociale (Adult Education Provider in the 'communauté française' – i.e. Wallonia and Brussels-Capital Regions);
- Institut de Formation des Petites et Moyennes Entreprises - IFAPME (Training Agency for the Self Employed and SMEs in the Communauté Francaise) ; and
- Service de Formation des petites et moyennes entreprises, SFPME, (Training Service for Small and Medium-Sized enterprises in Brussels).

Through the Consortium, procedures have been implemented allowing citizens to validate their competences acquired outside formal education and training. After completing the validation process, applicants receive a Skills Certificate which is a legal document recognised by the three French-speaking entities. This is a new Certificate however, which still has to be recognised by professional organisations and companies.

In July 2005, the combined authorities of the French-speaking community of Belgium published a second Strategic Plan for Research and Training, to develop knowledge and

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2 VAE in Belgium must be differentiated from the acronym VAE used in France, where “validation” (and not “valorisation”) of prior experience entails the award of a certification.

3 ReferNet Belgium, Overview of the Vocational Education and Training System, 2008

4 Consortium de Validation des Compétences
know-how in Wallonia. The plan acknowledged the progress made by the different actors involved but stressed that more needs to be done⁶. A specific objective in the plan was "to accelerate the process of development of the validation of competences", where progress to date was recognised but deemed insufficient.

More recently, the “Marshall Plan 2.0” (April 2009), through its perspective of optimising the approach given to occupations where shortages exist, has proposed to make the Validation mechanism (VCP) effective through various channels (education, initial and continuing training, professional experience etc.).

In its “Declaration of Regional Policies 2009-2014”, the Walloon Government set out its intention to “make Validation of Skills one of the priorities of the next term of office, since skills are the cornerstone to a competitive economy and a forward-moving society, and a crucial tool in fighting against trades where shortages exist. Action will be increased and the scope will be widened so a maximum number of individuals can reap the benefits”.

The CESRW (Economic and Social Council of the Walloon Region) clarified in its “Ten proposals to structure the future of the Walloon Region” Memorandum that “all sides of industry have a positive appreciation of the mechanism and intend to continue in supporting its development”. This publication additionally mentions a series of priority actions with the purpose of promoting the Validation of Skills⁷.

Higher education and VAE

In Higher Education the recognition of non-formal and informal learning was introduced by the Act of 5 September 1994 in universities and by the Act of 5 August 1995 in the hautes écoles (non-university higher education institutions). Universities were then authorised to organise, under specific conditions, access to a limited number of second cycle programmes to individuals who do not possess the required degree, as well as to grant exemptions in order to reduce the length of certain programmes⁸.

The Act of 31 March 2004, also known as the “Bologna Act”, introduced the terminology Valorisation des Acquis de l’Experience (VAE) for higher education. VAE is defined as a process of assessment and recognition of knowledge and competences of an individual wishing to enter a higher education programme. VAE gives adults the opportunity to undertake university studies by crediting knowledge gained through their life experiences. There are two types of VAE:

- VAE for admission, to second cycle programmes or to non-degree granting training programmes. The Government is authorised to set up minimum conditions for admission as well as the organisation of examination, while Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are responsible for procedures.

VAE for exemptions, to all higher education programmes, which allows students to reduce the length of their studies. However the length of programme leading to the delivery of an academic degree cannot decrease below 60 credits. Therefore applicants cannot obtain an academic degree based solely on this procedure⁹.

1.2 Relationship with the existing/ developing qualifications framework and information on standards used for validation

National qualifications framework of the French Community

The French Community of Belgium (the Walloon region and the French Community of Brussels) has been working on a national qualifications framework linked to the EQF since 2006. A National Coordination Point (NCP) for the EQF referencing will be established from

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⁶ Plan stratégique transversal 2 Recherche et formation – Développer les connaissances et les savoir-faire en Wallonie.
⁸ Study on formal recognition of non-formal and informal learning, Nuffic, November 2008
⁹ This is an important difference with the French VAE.
September 2010. This NCP, under the responsibility of the Service francophone des métiers et des qualifications (SFMQ), will also be responsible for coordinating issues related to validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The framework should facilitate the development of other tools and instruments for transparency, notably validation of non-formal and informal learning and credit transfer. Importantly, the proposal outlined a stepwise approach to the **positioning of qualifications according to a learning outcomes-based reference structure**. In spite of the lack of political clarification, the testing and piloting phases have resulted in a wide involvement of stakeholders. This testing now forms an important base of experiences for the further development of the framework.

The involvement of a wide range of stakeholders in the development of a system for validation of non-formal and informal learning may prove to be beneficial for the development of the NQF. Since 2006 a growing number of individuals have had their work experience validated by a Skills Certificate. This certificate is not the same as a qualification. While it can form part of a qualification it is supposed to carry an independent value in the labour market, making visible prior learning and achievement of the individual in question. Due to their recent introduction, these Skills Certificates are still relatively new to employers. The key issue at the moment is that their future value will depend on the extent to which they are integrated into the NQF and how they are linked to (the better known) certificates and diplomas.10

**Standards used for Validation in vocational training**

In vocational training the “validation” process leads to the award of a “titre de compétences”, a legal document recognised by the Walloon region, the French Community and the French Community Commission (COCOF).

In Belgium the reference used for the validation of skills is not the existing diploma or certificates, but the competence standards based on specific occupations. The link between the Skills Certificate awarded at the end of the validation process and the existing qualifications might be established at a later stage. This is a major difference with the French system where the standards used for validation are based on existing diplomas11.

The Consortium in charge of implementing the validation of skills policy has defined competences in terms of the set of measurable skills necessary to undertake certain tasks in a workplace situation12. In other words, the VCP system is geared towards measuring skills of direct relevance to specific job profiles. The system consists of job profiles developed by the French ROME system and by the Commission Communautaire des Professions et des Qualifications (CCPQ). The CCPQ has developed a set of qualification and training profiles, in close consultation with sector representatives and the unions. These profiles specify the competences required for each occupational profile, together with associated indicators.

The Consortium is responsible for the creation of **common standards** that are used to assess the competences of applicants and deliver Skills Certificates that will be recognised by the three governments of Belgium. At the end of 2008, 115 certificates, related to 37 occupations, had been created13. It is currently possible to validate skills within many occupations from sectors such as automobile, **construction**, **electricity** or care services14.

A stringent and concerted methodology in defining the occupations and assessment criteria has been developed by the Consortium.

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10 The Development of National Qualifications Frameworks in Europe, May 2010
11 Analyse comparée des systèmes de validation des acquis de l’expérience en France et en Belgique (communautés française et flamande)
12 Consortium d Validations des Compétences
For each occupation, management and labour representatives from various sectors and education and training providers form a Commission for Skill Unit Standards (Commission de Référentiels - COREF) which follows a methodology aimed at outlining the necessary criteria for the verification of the acquisition of skills.

Each occupation is divided into several skills units. For example, the home help occupation includes two skills units: on the one hand, upkeep of the home and on the other, laundry. This subdivision into skills units can be justified by the fact that a single person may only be an expert in one part of the occupation but should, nonetheless, be able to seek employment thanks to their skill. It is these skills units which will be the subject to validation. This should allow candidates to have their expertise recognised for part or for all of the skills involved in an occupation. Therefore, the COREF (specific to each occupation) define:

- A skills standards framework (rérérentiel de compétence) defines the occupation, a list of the key activities which are carried out and the skills required within the occupation.
- Within the skills standards framework, the occupation is then subdivided into skills units (unités de compétences). The number of competency units associated with an occupation varies between two and five, each of them corresponding to a titre de compétences.
- For each one of these skills units, validation standards (rérérentiel de validation) must be defined.

**Standards used in higher education**

VAE in Belgium does not lead directly to certification. It only grants access to University training courses or exemptions. The term of “valorisation” has been retained by the authorities, referring to the notion of enhancing experience, rather than using the concept of “validation” used in France which implies the award of a qualification.

The standards used for assessing the non-formal and informal learning are the requirements (in terms of competences and learning outcomes) of the programme for which the applicant wishes to gain entry or exemption. The reference is therefore the diploma and the focus is more on knowledge than on skills and competences.

1.3 National institutional framework

The Consortium set up to oversee the validation of skills policy is a legal entity and includes three internal bodies:

- A Steering Committee (daily organisation and management of the mechanism);
- An Executive Committee (secretariat and functioning);
- Ad hoc Commissions for Skills Unit Standards where management and labour representatives from various sectors sit so as to produce validation standards.

This structure is complemented by two external bodies:

- a Consultation and Approval Committee for Validation Centres, including inter alia inter-professional management and labour representatives and public employment services; general guidance, overall assessment, approval of centres.

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16 « [...] aucun grade académique ne peut être conféré par un établissement à un étudiant qui n’y aurait pas suivi néflecivement, en une année d’études au moins, 60 crédits du programme correspondant. », article 62, du décret du 31 mars 2004 définissant l’enseignement supérieur (…).
18 Study on formal recognition of non-formal and informal learning, Nuffic, November 2008
• an Appeals Commission; to address appeals lodged by candidates and Validation Centres.

The entire mechanism falls under the responsibility of the relevant Executive powers; namely, the governments of the French Community, of the Walloon region, the Brussels region and of the French Community Commission (COCOF).

The structure is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1 Structure mobilising the largest platform in terms of vocational qualifications in French-speaking Belgium**

1.4 Division of responsibilities (national, regional, local, provider level) according to the different aspects of validation

**Vocational training**

The validation of competences mechanism is specifically aimed at officially recognising professional knowledge and know-how acquired outside of typical training channels. This recognition is organised by the *Skills Validation Consortium* bringing together training providers via *Validation Centres* which organise tests which, when successfully carried out, lead to the issuing of Skills Certificate. The Validation Centres are established training providers run by the consortium partners.

The Consortium is also responsible for implementing the accreditation of the Validation Centres in the framework of a quality assurance approach. The Consortium oversees a network of 32 centres which carry out the recognition and validation of competencies.

**Higher education**

The following institutions are involved in the recognition process:

- HEIs are the first actors involved in the recognition of non-formal and informal learning and are responsible for the operational implementation of VAE. Moreover, HEIs should also play a major role in the dissemination of information to the applicants and to the other stakeholders involved. Coordination and consultation at institutional level will facilitate the harmonisation of procedures, the exchange of good practice and information, the collection of data concerning VAE.
- Ministry of the French Community – DG Non-Compulsory Education and Scientific Research. The Ministry plays an interface role with non-institutional stakeholders, facilitating the cooperation between those stakeholders and advisory bodies.
Advisory bodies from institutions (such as the Inter-university council of the French Community of Belgium - CIUF, General Council for Haute Ecoles, Education and Training Council etc.) have a crucial role to play in the cooperation and dialogue between institutions.

### 1.5 Examples of regional, local or EU funded initiatives

A VAE Platform (*Plateforme inter-universitaire pour la VAE*) bringing together French speaking academic institutions was set up in September 2008. This platform is co-financed by the European Social Fund (ESF). The budget for the period 2008-2013 is 5.6 million euro. The platform is steered by the ETALV Commission of the CIUF (Inter-university Council of the French Community) and is composed of one coordinator, VAE counsellors (11) and members of the Lifelong learning Commission (ETALV). The missions of the platform are to:

- Inform the public of the VAE Procedure,
- Guarantee fairness in the way VAE Candidates are treated (harmonisation of procedures),
- Set up a network of partnerships (Universities, FOREM, social integration operators),
- Encourage exchange of good practices between Universities,
- Assess the VAE practice in the French Community.

### 1.6 Link between validation and the existing/ developing credit system, unit-based or modularised structure of qualifications

#### Vocational training

Policy developments on the validation of skills follow on from earlier restructuring in the adult education sector. Since the adoption of the new legal framework in 1991 adult or continuing education (*enseignement de promotion sociale*) in the French Community has been progressively restructured to create a more coherent, modular structure with transferable credit units and more flexible timetables. For each module or “training unit/ unité de formation”, teaching and learning outcomes have been established, together with prerequisite levels of knowledge or experience for individuals wishing to undertake the course in question.

Regarding validation, a unit based approach has also been chosen, however it is not related to existing qualifications or training pathways. The Commission for Skill Unit Standards (Commission de Référentiels - COREF) defines several skills units corresponding to the occupations for which validation is possible. Each Skills Unit corresponds to a Skills Certificate. It is these skills units which will be the subject of validation. These skills units are not based on diploma or certificates, but on the competences standards developed by the Consortium.

#### Higher education

In March 2004, an important decree known as the ‘Bologna Decree’ redefined the whole of higher education in the French Community, with the aim to facilitate its inclusion within the European Higher Education Area. The usage of ECTS was confirmed, with one year of study corresponding to 60 ECTS. A student is awarded a bachelor's or master's degree after having obtained the credits of all the courses in the curriculum of the programme.

The curriculum of a degree programme is therefore conceived as a set of courses and each course stands for minimum 3 ECTS credits (with a maximum of 12 courses per 60 ECTS credits).

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19 ReferNet Belgium, Overview of the Vocational Education and Training System, 2008
Programmes in all cycles are defined in credits (which are legally defined) and nearly all HEIs have started to base their programmes on learning outcomes. However, there is a need for clarifying the understanding and supporting the use of learning outcomes.20

The evolution of higher education towards a system of credit accumulation and transfer, as well as modularisation of programmes, benefits the applicants to VAE wishing to resume their studies.21

In VAE for exemptions, students are allowed to reduce the length of their studies, under the condition that the length of programme leading to the delivery of an academic degree does not decrease below 60 credits.

1.7 Funding framework

The skills validation procedure (VCP) is entirely free of costs for applicants. The real costs of the procedure are covered by the government which subsidises validation sessions. Indeed the procedure entails costs in terms of human resources for the centres organising the assessment. The use of validation as a method applied to higher education (universités and hautes écoles) is also supported by public funds. In 2006, the Lifelong Learning Commission of the Conseil Universitaire de la Communauté française, CIUF (University Council of the French Community) received a grant from the French Community to support the development of good practice in supporting adults to resume studies and the structuring of activities for the validation of experience in the Académies. This grant was distributed to the three university Académies, each of which set in place a pilot project for VAE. These pilot projects, starting in 2006, correspond to the “testing phase” of VAE in Universities.

A review of the funding received by Universities to implement VAE will take place in 2013, after an evaluation of the procedure.

1.8 Data on flows of beneficiaries

Vocational training

The number of beneficiaries is within the targets that were set by the government. In 2008 the objective for VCP was 650 beneficiaries, and the actual number 987. In 2009 the number of beneficiaries reached 1364, compared to a target of 78022. The most represented occupations are accounting assistants, cleaning ladies and administrative clerks. As shown in Figure 2 below the number of applicants has grown rapidly. Almost half of applicants are job seekers23.

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20 National report on Bologna reforms, French Community, 2009

21 Rapport final du projet : Proposition de structuration et d’organisation des activités de VAE dans l’enseignement supérieur en Communauté française, October 2006

22 Consortium de Validation des Compétences

23 Danse Cédric, Peters Stéphanie et Faulx Daniel, Unité d’Apprentissage et de Formation des Adultes – Université de Liège, Valorisation et validation de l’expérience et des compétences : pratiques en Belgique francophone
To increase the number of applicants, a strategic Memorandum recommended that the number of programmes for which VCP is available should be increased. Thus, at the end of 2008 the Consortium offered certification in 37 mainly technical occupations in which a shortage of available workers had been identified. These were grouped into 11 categories: administrative work (accounting assistant, administrative aide, etc.), food service (worker for confectioner or baker, meat cutting and counter help for butcher shop), automotive (maintenance technician, mechanic), chemical industry (production line in plastics making), construction (laying flooring, making moulds and forms, masonry work), culture (assistant backstage technician), non-commercial work (maid service), green jobs (climber, tree trimmer), technical work (repair of automatic machines, sheet metal worker) and personal service (hair stylist). According to research on validation in Belgium, the number of beneficiaries of the VCP procedure is still rather low due to the low visibility of the procedure and its recent implementation.

**Higher education**

For the Higher Education sector, seven Universities in French speaking Belgium are currently offering VAE to applicants. Data from 2008 indicate that 294 applicants were examined by the VAE jury and that 185 registered as students. However these figures were only collected between September and December 2008.

VAE in **hautes écoles** is more recent and in practice the procedure has not been implemented yet.

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24 Danse Cédric, Peters Stéphanie et Faulx Daniel, Unité d’Apprentissage et de Formation des Adultes – Université de Liège, *Valorisation et validation de l’expérience et des compétences : pratiques en Belgique francophone*


26 Danse Cédric, Peters Stéphanie et Faulx Daniel, Unité d’Apprentissage et de Formation des Adultes – Université de Liège, *Valorisation et validation de l’expérience et des compétences : pratiques en Belgique francophone*

27 Data do not provide a breakdown between applicants for exemptions and applicants for admission.

28 Danse Cédric, Peters Stéphanie et Faulx Daniel, Unité d’Apprentissage et de Formation des Adultes – Université de Liège, *Valorisation et validation de l’expérience et des compétences : pratiques en Belgique francophone*
2 ORGANISATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON VALIDATION

2.1 Role of the formal education and training sector, including providers

Higher Education

VAE mechanisms have been introduced in all higher education institutions. In higher education recognition of non-formal and informal learning was introduced by the Acts of 5 September 1994 in universities and 5 August 1995 in the hautes écoles. Universities were then authorised to organise, under specific conditions, the access, without holding the required degree, to a limited number of second-cycle programmes as well as to grant exemptions in order to reduce the length of programmes. However the implementation decree was only adopted in 2004, therefore the procedure is still recent. Two types of VAE exist:

1. VAE for admission to second cycle programmes or to non-degree granting training programmes (mostly continuing training). To be admitted in a master programme, applicants have to prove five years of professional experience (prior studies can also be taken into account). The government is authorised to set up minimal conditions as well as the organisation of examinations while HEIs are responsible for procedures.

2. VAE for exemptions in all higher education programmes. This allows students to reduce the duration of their studies. However, the duration of the programmes leading to the delivery of an academic degree cannot decrease below 60 credits. Therefore, applicants to this type of VAE will never be granted an academic degree based only on this procedure. This is the reason why the procedure is called “valorisation” and not “validation”.

The standards used for assessing the non-formal and informal learning are the requirements (in terms of competences and learning outcomes) of the programme for which the applicant wishes to gain entry or exemption29.

The 2005 Strategic Plan for Research and Training states that a valorisation process should encourage those adults (job-seekers and those in employment) who wish to enter higher education to do so via the valorisation of their professional experience, other experience and training. Aside from the personal benefits to the individual, it is intended that this should facilitate job-search and promote active citizenship among those adults who resume higher education study. The plan sets out the following objectives for the sphere of higher education:

- to encourage higher education institutions to accept adults wishing to resume higher studies. This requires partnerships to be set up between higher education institutions and the FOREM;
- to establish a framework for the validation of competences as a method of gaining a place at a higher education institution.

VAE therefore marks a profound change for universities with the task of identifying and measuring learning that is accomplished outside its boundaries. This entails organising in an adequate manner the acceptance and monitoring of progress for adults that want to take up university studies or other forms of learning as mature students, recognising learning acquired outside its gates, in many different places (businesses, non-governmental organisations, etc.), appreciating the quality of skills gained in this manner, accepting the

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29 Study on formal recognition of non-formal and informal learning, Nuffic, November 2008
sometimes fragmentary character of this acquired knowledge, and helping people improve their knowledge based on such fragments.30

VAE in *hautes écoles* is more recent and in practice the procedure has not been implemented yet. The Act concerning the recognition of non-formal and informal learning by the *hautes écoles* specifies more precisely the recognition procedure: in the case of entering a second-cycle programme, applicants have to prove four years of professional experience at least and have the required knowledge and skills verified through an assessment procedure; in case of benefiting from exemptions, applicants have to prove three years of professional experience and the exemptions cannot exceed 20 % of the total programme. Recognition of non-formal and informal learning in art schools was introduced by the Government Act of 17 July 2002 and concerns only the access to a second cycle programme based on professional experience31.

**Vocational training**

Regarding continuing vocational training, Validation Centres carry out certification by delivering *titres de compétences* (Skills Certificates) to adults who can prove that they meet the standards for a certain occupation. These *titres de compétences* are based on testing and in the future a competence portfolio will also be used. These Skills Certificates are not on their own, equivalent to standard diplomas, but are designed to facilitate access to further training courses. They are recognised by law. The *titres de compétences* can also be accumulated to obtain a qualification, on the condition of passing an integrated test (*épreuve intégrée*) organised by the Enseignement de Promotion Sociale.

For training providers, validation of competences poses certain challenges, such as the fact that they have to assess competences instead of simply providing the training to acquire these competences. This is a new task for these providers. The validation process is also time and resource consuming for these organisations which are not financially supported by subsidies for the implementation of validation. In addition, the fact of delivering a Skills Certificate without providing the training beforehand means a loss of revenue for certain providers, whilst the individual learner is saving the fees of a training course.

As validation is still very recent, it is not yet integrated in the internal logistic of these organisations. Evaluations of these organisations focus on the training provided rather than the number of validation procedures they have set up and carried out32.

### 2.2 Role of existing information, advice and guidance networks / institutions

The role of counsellors in public employment services such as FOREM is to inform the persons who might benefit from validation of the existence of the VCP scheme and to provide them with the relevant information (e.g. how to direct them to Validation Centres). A guide for Counsellors has been elaborated by the Consortium for the validation of skills. The role of the counsellor is essential prior to but also after validation. Indeed the counsellor is also responsible for guidance once the Skills Certificate has been obtained, in particular regarding the recognition of this Certificate by employers.

It is worth mentioning the role of the advisory and supervisory bodies in profiling occupations and drawing up the qualification profiles on which training profiles are based.33 For instance, the Education and Training Council (*Conseil de l’Education et de la Formation*) includes representatives from education and training. Its main task is to promote the training and education organised or subsidised by the Community. It gives opinions on

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33 ReferNet Belgium, Overview of the Vocational Education and Training System, 2008
various issues. Another example is the role of the Community Commission for Occupations and Qualifications (CCPQ). The main task of this body is to draw up education profiles, i.e. the set of competences to be acquired for the award of the qualification certificate at the end of secondary education. The aim was to correct the evident mismatch between the level of training given in technical and vocational education and employers’ increasingly demanding requirements. This Commission comprises various partners (education, enterprise, trade union organisations sitting on the National Labour Council and professional bodies) and may call upon experts.

The Commission set up nine advisory committees chaired by representatives from the world of enterprise. Each committee corresponds to one of the nine current sectors of secondary qualification education. The task of each advisory committee is to draw up profiles for the jobs in its sector.

In the HE sector, HEIs themselves play a major role in the dissemination of information towards the applicants but also the other stakeholders involved. The enrolment / admission departments are generally the services in charge of promoting VAE (some universities services have counsellors dedicated to VAE admission).

In addition a VAE Platform has been set up at university level, funded by the French Community and the ESF (5.6 million euro)\(^3\). It aims to raise awareness about VAE and propose recommendations to the different actors involved in the process, encourage harmonisation and promote collaboration between universities but also non academic institutions. This platform groups coordinators, VAE counsellors, members of the ETALV Commission.

2.3 Validation in the private sector and the role of private sector actors

The social partners are involved with the public actors in the definition of systems of references within the framework of the validation of skills.

The CCPQ (Community Commission for Professions and Qualifications) brings together public and private partners from the spheres of education, business, trade unions and representatives of other training providers. The CCPQ has two key aims:

- to verify the relevance of training provision to the current and future needs of business and where necessary, to instigate necessary amendments;
- to redefine training provision and place more emphasis on the skills which must be acquired, rather than the volume of content which is delivered.

In order to achieve these aims, the CCPQ set up nine Consultative Commissions which prepare the profiles – there is one commission for each of the nine training sectors. The Commissions are composed of groups of representatives from the same range of organisations as the CCPQ and are led by business representatives.

For each occupation considered within the framework of the validation of competences, a Commission de Référentiels has been established which brings together the social partners for the sector with education and training providers. Within a timeframe of four to six months these Commissions are expected to meet at least six times in order to determine competence and validation reference frameworks for the occupations within the relevant sectors:

- A skills standards framework (rérérentiel de compétence) defines the occupation, a list of the key activities which are carried out and the skills required within the occupation.
- Within the skills standards framework, the occupation is then subdivided into skills units’ (unités de compétences). The number of competency units associated with an

\(^3\) Rapport conjoint 2010, Mise en œuvre du programme “Education et Formation 2010”
occupation varies between two and five, each of them corresponding to a titre de compétences.

- For each one of these skills units, validation standards (*référentiel de validation*) must be defined.

The Commission ensures that the needs of private actors are taken into account in the elaboration of validation standards.

**Employers**

As the validation procedure is still new in Belgium, employers and social partners do not yet have a good knowledge of validation and a certain degree of mistrust exists. In particular, the impact of the Skills Certificate is questioned by employers, in terms of salary rise for instance. The consequences entailed by the new procedure are still unclear.

However, the advantages of validation are also emerging more and more clearly. Recruitment can be facilitated as the Skills Certificate provides precious information on the ability of the candidate to perform certain tasks. It reduces uncertainties related to the competences of the future employee and can therefore accelerate recruitment.

In addition, the validation process can be envisaged as a HR strategy by the company, as the recognition of employees’ competences can have positive internal effects (on motivation, social capital etc.) but also external (increased mobility, public recognition of the quality of staff etc.).

The role of skills or competencies in Human Resource Management has become a significant issue in many private sector organisations in Belgium. Many companies have undertaken analysis of the activities, roles and job and person specifications within their businesses, leading to the establishment of standards or *référentiels* related to specific jobs. These developments are generally used within businesses to feed into remuneration decisions (linking pay to skills), mobility within the firm and recruitment policies and requirements.

Recognition of skills can be seen as an innovative Human Resource Management tool, and a new alternative to:

- Reduce uncertainty when recruiting both externally and internally;
- Motivate and value employees;
- Support internal development;
- Improve the image of professionalism portrayed by the company;
- Perpetuate expertise;
- Rationalise training pathways.

However research in France and Belgium shows that these processes tend to be mainly used in contexts of restructuring.

### 2.4 Validation in the third sector and the role of third sector actors

Associations working in the social integration sector have welcomed the validation of competences process, as it makes it easier to re-orient individuals who hold a Skills Certificate. In addition, an individual without a Skills Certificate, who will be supported by the association, will be able, with the adequate experience, to apply and obtain such a certificate, which represents an added value to the work of these associations.

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However, according to the Consortium no validation tools or processes have been set up in the third sector to date (for instance relating to volunteering). However, the Consortium does carry out work with the third sector, to inform and disseminate the concept of validation in order to engage hard-to-reach target groups and thereby increase the number of candidates being validated. The associations which have been engaged so far mainly deal with the integration (social and professional) of marginalised, disadvantaged groups (e.g. the long term unemployed etc.) or mobile workers (travailleurs en mobilité) who have arrived in Belgium and are not aware of the opportunities offered by validation. Collaboration with these third sector organisations is key to bringing them the necessary support and providing them with the information they need, since these target groups are in need of intense and specific support (including moral support).

Some of the organisations involved are federations of associations working with the public services like FOREM. For instance the Consortium works with the Agence wallonne pour l'intégration des personnes handicapées (AWIPH – agency for the integration of disabled people), which is also a target group potentially interested in validation but requiring specific support. The Consortium also works with the Federation of associations working with people who are unable to read and write.

The Consortium plans to develop ‘toolkits’ (Kits de l’accompagnement) in 2012 for these organisations. These toolkits will explain for example how to reach these target groups, how to explain validation to them, etc).

2.5 Costs to organisations

Candidates to VCP have access to training leave paid by the state (royal decree of 10 November 2006). Employees are entitled to eight hours per year; this represents an asset for candidates and enterprises.

For HE institutions, the main cost related to VAE is the recruitment of additional staff to advise, orient and support candidates. These costs are currently covered by the funding received by Universities for the implementation of VAE.

3 INDIVIDUAL PERSPECTIVE

3.1 Awareness-raising and recruitment

Various pathways and access points to Validation Centres are currently being developed. Several options are being investigated to implement validation and increase its usage:

- Validation is still a new phenomenon for citizens, companies and training providers. Efforts to provide information must be increased in the coming years;
- Modalities for exemptions and access to training are still being defined;
- Public employment services were involved rapidly to ensure that job seekers were properly oriented towards validations centres when relevant;
- Social partners were also involved in order to ensure that their members were informed about validation (employees and employers);
- Awareness raising activities were carried out with re-training and re-deployment agencies.

As the procedures for validation of competences are still recent in Belgium, users are not yet familiar with them and there is a degree of mistrust towards the Certificate that is

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36 Rapport conjoint 2010, Mise en oeuvre du programme “Education et Formation 2010”
delivered at the end of the procedure. The evaluation aspect of the procedure is also a factor hindering certain potential users from going through the procedure. For Higher Education, a Commission for Lifelong Learning (ETALV), which brings together francophone universities, has been entrusted with a mission to promote VAE with the general public.

3.2 Provision of guidance and support

Applicants have to submit an application in the Validation Centre which delivers the Skills Certificate they wish to obtain. They receive information on the process of validation, the different stages, the examination methods etc. During this phase the applicant will also determine, during an interview with a member of the Validation Centre, which Certificate he/she would like to validate. The interview is meant to provide guidance to the future candidate.

Following this first phase of information and guidance, the applicant will go through a practical exam (see Section 5.1 for a description of the assessment). In the HE sector the Commission for Lifelong Learning (ETALV) within the CIUF, which brings together francophone universities, has been entrusted with mission to promote VAE with the general public.

HEIs also play a major role in the spreading of information towards the applicants. Each university ensures that counsellors are available to advise potential applicants to VAE. The counselling service is usually ensured by the Enrolment/ Admission Department of the University. The Mons University for instance has two VAE counsellors. The University of Brussels (ULB) offers the possibility to be supported by counsellors through one to one interviews (maximum three).

3.3 Costs to individuals

Skills validation (VCP) and VAE are entirely free for applicants.

3.4 Initiatives focused on specific target groups

Individuals primarily targeted by the Validation of competences procedures are job seekers, who represent 74.9% of the applicants to VCP between 2005 and 2008. However the objective of the VCP procedure is to reach a wider public, including employees and enterprises. Priority is currently given to the following target groups:

- Workers, in or out of employment (with priority given to the unemployed);
- Individuals with skills which are not recognised;
- Individuals without an upper secondary education diploma (CESS).

Target groups are also selected in line with the current employment policies and measures in place, in order to ensure that the Skills certificate can help to support these (e.g. policies to help older workers).

3.5 Evidence of benefits to individuals

The main objective of the legislation on VCP is to enable citizens over the age of 18 to gain recognition for the competences they have acquired through professional experience and training and through other life experiences. Official recognition of individuals’ skills is seen

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37 Danse Cédric, Peters Stéphanie et Faulx Daniel, Unité d’Apprentissage et de Formation des Adultes – Université de Liège, Valorisation et validation de l’expérience et des compétences : pratiques en Belgique francophone
38 http://www.cvdc.be/fr/usager/comment-sinscrire.html
39 Danse Cédric, Peters Stéphanie et Faulx Daniel, Unité d’Apprentissage et de Formation des Adultes – Université de Liège, Valorisation et validation de l’expérience et des compétences : pratiques en Belgique francophone
as beneficial in terms of their professional identity and should guarantee access to continuing education, enable the individual to manage their career path and allow them to validate their abilities within the labour market.

It allows individuals not only to receive exemptions in the framework of later training (non-university type instruction) but also must facilitate, for persons who have some professional/occupational experience (gained through training or on the job), official recognition of their skills. The validation of competences acquired outside the school system plays a major role in professional and geographical mobility.

According to the Skills Validation Consortium, the advantages of validation of the competences are the following:

- Increased chances of finding employment. Skill Certificates constitute additional assets in seeking employment since they are recognised by the FOREM (Public Service for Employment and Training in the Walloon region) and Actiris (Public Employment Service in the Brussels Region);
- Facilitated access to vocational training programmes. Thanks to Skill Certificates, an individual can increase the value of their skills with training providers, better outline a career and, where applicable, streamline the training programme required due to exemptions;
- Official recognition of their experience;
- Bolstering professional identity and self-confidence.

In practice, the Skill Certificates have still not been made part of the Collective Labour Agreements. In the area of employment, the Consortium is conducting negotiations with social partners that could help it reach greater effectiveness; up to the present it has been limited to individual agreements. In the area of training, the granting of exemptions on the basis of the Skill Certificates has begun to be made routine institutionally.

During the debates that led up to the creation of the Consortium, a number of actors were in fact opposed to giving the Titres de compétence the same properties as diplomas. In an opinion issued by the Conseil de l’éducation et de la formation (Council for education and training) in 1997, certification and validation were to be differentiated based on the criterion of their “social value” (“effets de droit” for the first and “effects” that were yet to be defined based on an increased “visibility” of skills for the second), on the type of skills concerned (a significant group of skills in various cultural domains to be mastered on the theoretical and practical level for the first, and individual skills described in a reference definition for the second) and on the mode of evaluation (overall specific test for the first, validation of a limited number of skills for the second) 40.

Regarding VAE in higher education, the main benefit lies in the access of adults to University studies (candidates resuming their studies41), to upgrade their qualifications or simply for their personal development. The presence of these adults in training courses that are not primarily designed for them is transforming the academic landscape, while teachers are confronted with increasingly mixed audiences, with different expectations and demands.42

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40 Peters S., Mahieu C., Salmon, A., Danse, C. de Viron, F. & Faux, D., Recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning in French-speaking Belgium. Discourse and practices.
41 Candidats, adultes en reprise d’études (ARE).
42 Rapport final du projet : Proposition de structuration et d’organisation des activités de VAE dans l’enseignement supérieur en Communauté française.
4 QUALITY ASSURANCE AND EVALUATION

4.1 Quality Assurance Framework

In vocational training, the Consortium overseeing validation is responsible for implementing the accreditation of the Validation Centres in the framework of a quality assurance approach. At the end of 2008, 32 Validation Centres had obtained an accreditation and were thereby able to organise assessment for several occupations.\(^{43}\)

More concretely, the concept of competence at the basis of the validation mechanism developed in French-speaking Belgium, the definition by the COREF pertaining to a profession, the integration of Consortium processes within a quality approach all make the Validation mechanism compatible with the European measures underway; the framework of European Credit for Vocational and Educational Training (ECVET), a complement of the Europass certificate.\(^{44}\)

National legislation does not specify any particular quality assurance mechanisms for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning procedures in higher education. Since academic authorities are responsible for the organisation and implementation of the recognition of prior learning procedures, those authorities are expected to guarantee the quality of the procedures.

HEIs are responsible for the quality of the procedures used for VAE. There is so far no centralised body in charge of recognition of prior learning in higher education.\(^{45}\)

4.2 Quality assurance systems / procedures

A stringent and concerted methodology in defining assessment criteria has been developed by the Consortium. These criteria are recognised by the Walloon region, the French Community and the French Community Commission (COCOF). The mechanism described under Section 1.2 allows assessment procedures to fulfil the following quality criteria:

- **Transparency**: all candidates receive identical information about the assessment procedure.
- **Fairness**: all candidates benefit from an identical assessment procedure, on the basis of a single set of skills assessment indicators, no matter who is being assessed, where, when or how an assessment takes place.
- **Validity**: assessment procedures are stringent.

**Quality as the foundation for approval of Validation Centres**

When the skills standards and validation standards are produced, the corresponding offer is organised within the Validation Centres, based on their ability and willingness to do it.

The stakes involved in the validation of skills have led governments to position the validation mechanism in the public service sector whilst retaining close ties with management and labour representatives on strategic, normative and operational levels. To guarantee both the quality and homogeneity of the service, an approval mechanism for Validation Centres has been implemented. Specific approval for each occupation is required to validate the skills of candidates.

\(^{43}\) Rapport conjoint 2010, Mise en oeuvre du programme “Education et Formation 2010”


\(^{45}\) Study on formal recognition of non-formal and informal learning, Nuffic, November 2008
Candidate Centres prepare their programmes on the basis of a list of specifications issued by the Consortium. This list supports the Candidate Centre and subsequently governs its control\(^{46}\).

After a preliminary audit undertaken by independent verification bodies as well as an opinion from management and labour representatives, Validation Centres receive approval by governments with a view to accepting candidates and validating their skills.

In general Validation Centres offer VCP corresponding to one or two occupations. For instance the Validation Centre « Enseignement De Promotion Sociale De Bruxelles Ouest » provides validation for the home help occupation (household care/laundry).

### 4.3 Evaluation framework

After the assessment sessions, candidates have the possibility to fill in an evaluation grid which will be reviewed by the manager of the Validation Centre. Following the review of the evaluation sheets the centres can use the results for improvements and communicate, via the electronic platform VAL’ID the requests for improvement to the Consortium, if this is relevant.

Five years after the implementation of the decree on VAE in Belgium, the first evaluations have started and should soon feed into a review of the procedure and possible recommendations to improve the system.

One of the missions of the Commission accrediting the Validation Centres is also to evaluate the system and propose strategic orientations to further develop the VCP procedure\(^{47}\).

### 5 ASSESSMENT METHODS

#### 5.1 Methods used

**Vocational training**

Public employment agencies and their social partners are involved in the effort along with the five training agencies: they help determine the occupations for which experiential validation is to be set up in terms of priorities, and help define points of reference for skill assessment and the testing that may correspond to it. The candidate is asked to prove his or her skill or ability in a given occupation in a situation that is typical for the given occupation, in an approved training centre.

Once approval has been gained for particular occupations, Validation Centres schedule their testing sessions. Centre Managers appoint one examiner, one observer and one logistical manager for each test.

Prior to registering candidates, centres put together brief guidelines to ensure that candidates have been correctly directed towards validation and make sure that candidates are informed about failure.

Before the test, the candidate will go through an interview whereby his/her chances of success will be discussed.

During the test, a professional situation is reconstructed following the validation standards. Candidates are asked to demonstrate their skills in a practical fashion in the presence of experienced professionals who form the panel. Their work is observed by the examiner on the basis of a standard assessment criteria sheet. The observer (trade professional) checks that the testing procedure is organised correctly and participates at the end of the test.

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\(^{47}\) Danse Cédric, Peters Stéphanie et Faulx Daniel, Unité d’Apprentissage et de Formation des Adultes – Université de Liège, Valorisation et validation de l’expérience et des compétences : pratiques en Belgique francophone
Directed by the Validation Centre Manager, a panel composed of the examiner and the observer deliberate the performance of the test. Candidates are subsequently informed of the test result. Each candidate can have an interview if required and will receive, if successful, a Skill Certificate by post.48

Following the completion of a validation test, the candidate who has successfully demonstrated skills in a given occupation is being awarded one or more Skills Certificates. Candidates can always appeal against the decision taken by the panel. The specific steps to be taken in case of appeal are fully described on the Consortium website.

Skill Certificates are official documents issued on behalf of the French Community, of the Walloon Region and the French Community Commission and are additionally recognised by Public Employment Services. This Certificate will facilitate applicants’ future job search.

**Higher Education**

There is no common procedure for HEIs who offer VAE. Different projects have been developed by university academies in order to define harmonised procedures through standards and guidelines. They are coordinated by the CUIF and the results produced by these projects have not yet been disseminated. The CUIF also set up an inter-university platform for VAE in order to harmonise the processes and methods used.

In general the life experience claimed by an individual is evaluated by a jury whose members belong to the programme to which the adult wishes to apply. The jury decides if the individual’s experience is indeed “useful” in terms of programme requirements and if the knowledge so gained is really sufficient for the individual to succeed in the programme they have applied for. VAE involves a narrative or explanation from a candidate regarding his or her acquired knowledge, along with a presentation of proof of the latter. The procedure varies from one programme to another, but may consist in the presentation of a dossier (file) or portfolio, the oral defence of the same before a jury, or taking a test. This has to do with intellectual occupations, for the most part, and a successful presentation leads to admission to university level instruction.49

For instance in the University of Liège (ULg), admission by means of VAE is granted on the basis of submission of individual files. Applicants must submit a file that includes the following:

- Admission application form;
- Copy of diploma attesting completion of secondary studies;
- Copy of grade reports from each of the years of higher education, even for failed years (if necessary);
- Copy of higher education diploma(s);
- Official documentation of activities and studies over the past 5 years, if this period is not covered by the studies leading to the most recent diploma;
- Letter stating the reasons for wanting to study at the University of Liège;
- Any relevant document attesting the professional or personal experiences for which the applicant is seeking credit (attestations from work, publications, proof of employment, accomplishments etc.).

The file is transmitted to an appropriate jury, which makes a decision on the applicant’s request as quickly as possible. The jury can invite the applicant to a personal interview.

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49 Peters S., Mahieu C., Salmon, A., Danse, C. de Viron, F. & Faulx, D., Recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning in French-speaking Belgium. Discourse and practices.
University academies stress the importance of adopting a student-centred approach, where individualised learning paths are taken into account. They recommend a procedure comprising six main steps:

- **Information and reception:** Applicants for VAE need quality information, preferably centralised at the French Community and HEI levels;
- **Orientation and positioning:** Applicants would have the possibility to explain their plans in more detail, with the help of centres of information/orientation. The competent authorities would then have the possibility to determine if the application is acceptable and valid;
- **Contractualisation:** The contract is double-sided: on the one hand, HEIs commit themselves to analysing, assessing and deciding on the outcome of the application; on the other hand the application must be fully committed to the process as well;
- **Assessment:** the jury will evaluate and take a decision on the non-formal and informal learning presented in order to gain recognition;
- **Transmission of results:** the jury formally transmits the results of the assessment and may offer recommendations regarding the future study programme of the applicant, and
- **Support:** Applicants need special support during each step the process. Most of the applicants are indeed adults returning to higher education, therefore it is important that VAE remains a positive experience for the applicants.

### 5.2 Advantages and disadvantages of the methods used

#### Vocational training

The most commonly used method is the assessment of the candidate in a professional situation. Another method is allowed by the decree on VCP, which is the constitution of an application file by the candidate. Initially it was felt that the “observation” method brings more guarantee to the Consortium partners, but also to the candidates, as it ensures that they are assessed in situations that are similar to their workplace. Occupations for which validation is currently organised are well suited for this type of assessment. However, it is important to acknowledge that an assessment situation built on a standard is in the majority of cases quite different from the real working environment.

This mode of assessment is being further developed and improved. In particular it could still be simplified. The combination of criteria such as the credibility of the process (external jury, confidentiality, independence) with demands of the sectors as regards the tasks to be carried out (duration, equipment, complexity of the situation) makes the organisation of such examinations difficult, especially for Validation Centres with a low level of activity.

The assessment method through an “application file” is currently being examined.

#### Higher Education

The Decree that administratively established the VAE is vague regarding the elements of experience that can be credited and their evaluation, leaving to universities the establishment of an appropriate method for evaluation. Programme juries have full authority in the matter of VAE, something that presents certain advantages such as the equality of treatment and uniformity in criteria of evaluation, since it is the same jury that evaluates “traditional” students (and their normal sequences of course) as well as the life experiences of non-traditional students through VAE – and this process induces juries to act responsibly (since they are involved in every step, from the admission procedure to the final evaluation).

In addition, universities implement VAE independently, without consultation with other
organisms, which distinguishes Belgium from other countries such as France, where more actors are involved in the process.\textsuperscript{52}

In order to harmonise the process, universities established an inter-university platform for VAE in 2008. This platform had the objective of informing the public about the procedure, making sure that candidates were all treated equally by the way of a harmonisation of procedures, promoting exchanges regarding practices between universities, playing the role of interface between the academic world and external organisms, constructing an observatory for VAE and coordinating the progress of this new way of going to university. Eleven VAE counsellors, three project managers and one coordinator were employed to run the platform. Universities could use the platform to develop a common discourse and to have access to better adapted tools for attaining their objectives with regard to VAE. It should be emphasised that this initiative was not only original within Belgium, but in Europe itself.\textsuperscript{53}

6 VALIDATION PRACTITIONERS

6.1 Profile of validation practitioners

The Skills Validation Consortium is responsible for the establishment a network of Validation Centres that will provide the \textit{titres de compétences}. The Validation Centres are established training providers run by the consortium partners. Applicants are assessed by a panel composed of the examiner and the observer. Examiners are trainers or teachers of the occupation concerned by the validation with a minimum of five years experience in this occupation. Observers are professionals in the occupation concerned by validation.

All types of HEIs are also competent for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning acquired in a professional context. The \textit{Jury de valorisation} is defined in articles 53 and 60 of the “Bologna Act” as the body recognising and adding value to the professional and personal experience of the applicants. The jury is fully competent in its responsibilities. The jury will evaluate and take a decision on the non-formal and informal learning subject to recognition. The jury formally transmits the results of the assessment and may give some recommendations regarding the future study programme of the applicant. According to article 68 of the Bologna Act, the jury can constitute commissions of three members at least, for the purpose of VAE. The jury is selected by the department of the HEI in charge of recognition of non-formal and informal recognition.

6.2 Provision of training and support to practitioners

The training of evaluators for VCP is compulsory and strongly advised for Validation Centre managers. The training is provided by a methodological expert from the Consortium.

The \textit{Consortium de Validation des Compétences} delivers training to evaluators and staff involved in the management of validation. This training lasts for one day and covers issues such as:

- A presentation of the concept of validation;
- The role of the evaluator and how to use a competence standard;
- The assessment process;
- How to provide guidance and support to applicants.

The training involves presentations, group work and question-answer sessions.

\textsuperscript{52} Peters S., Mahieu C., Salmon, A., Danse, C. de Viron, F. & Faulx, D., Recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning in French-speaking Belgium. Discourse and practices.

\textsuperscript{53} Peters S., Mahieu C., Salmon, A., Danse, C. de Viron, F. & Faulx, D., Recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning in French-speaking Belgium. Discourse and practices.
The coaching of the observers is carried out by the centre manager or the person responsible for validation.

6.3 Qualifications requirements

**Evaluators** are employed by a Validation Centre, or have a temporary contract with the centre. To become an evaluator, one must:

- Be a trainer or teacher of the occupation concerned by the validation;
- Belong to one of the five public institutions members of the Validation Consortium (Bruxelles Formation, Enseignement de Promotion sociale, FOREM-formation, IFAPME, SFPME).

OR

- Have five years experience in the occupation concerned by the validation, not having left the occupation for more than five years;

**Observers** are professionals in the occupation concerned by validation. They are appointed by the Validation Centre and must:

- Have five years experience in the occupation concerned by the validation; not having left the occupation for more than five years;
- Not have any pedagogical, professional or personal links to the candidate. If such link exists, the Validation Centre must choose another observer. The condition related to the ‘pedagogical’ link has just been removed, to ease the process.

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Consortium de la validation des compétences : http://www.cvdc.be

Council for Education and Training: http://www.cef.cfwb.be

Le FOREM : http://www.leforem.be

Conseil Interuniversitaire de la Communauté française http://www.ciuf.be/

Stakeholders consulted :
Consortium de la validation des compétences
CIUF - Conseil Interuniversitaire de la Communauté française de Belgique
Université de Liège (ULg)