European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning 2010
Country Report: France

By Anne-Marie Charraud
1 NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON VALIDATION

In France, the first practices of validation of non-formal and informal learning date back to 1934, when engineers without formal qualifications were given the right to access an engineering diploma and thus benefit from wages and benefits commensurate with their activity. But it was not until the 1980’s that this approach became more widely adopted - it takes time to undergo the cultural change required for the introduction of a system of validation and adopt the idea that an individual can learn and acquire knowledge and competencies outside formal learning.

On the one hand, validation has been used to grant admissions to certain study programmes.

In France, a new practice emerged in the 1970s, when a new pedagogical approach moved towards the modularisation of training, to recognise the learning outcomes of workers (obtained through work experience or short in-company training courses) as an entry route to Higher Education (HE). Through an evaluation of professional skills and competences (positionnement or evaluation des compétences et aptitudes professionnelles), it is possible to grant exemption from a pre-requisite to enter a formal training curriculum for a formal qualification from a HE institution, or a part of this training.

Regarding short, non-university vocational studies, a similar procedure of positionnement for applicants may be used.

In 1985 a decree was adopted to allow professional experience to be taken into consideration in determining access to HE (concerning only universities and other types of HE institutions, such as schools for engineers). The process, termed 'Validation des Acquis Professionnels 85'1 enables all person aged 20 or over who ended their initial studies at least two years before to apply for a place on a HE course through exemption of the qualification normally required. Any form of training, experience acquired through paid or voluntary work and knowledge or skills acquired independently of training can be taken into account in their application. A Pedagogical Commission assesses each applicant’s portfolio.

On the other hand, the main system of validation in France (Validation des acquis de l’expérience, VAE is used to deliver a whole or components of a qualification (certification)2 on the basis of the knowledge and skills of the applicant acquired through experience. The qualification awarded having same value as those awarded through the formal system of education and training.

The current validation system stems from legislation introduced in 1992 creating the concept of Validation des Acquis Professionnels (‘VAP 92’). It was to be used for exemptions for qualifications awarded by the Ministries of Education and Agriculture (secondary and higher education). People with five years’ work experience could apply for partial exemptions by submitting a portfolio detailing the activities undertaken and skills and competences gained through their experience, which was then examined by an assessment panel. In 1999, VAP was extended to include qualifications delivered by the Ministry of Youth and Sport.

Since 17 January 2002 (Social Modernisation Act), the validation system was renamed VAE and extended to include all qualification officially recognised by the State and the social

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1 The 1984 January 26 Law and the 1985 August 23 Decree mentioned exactly: "validation des études, expériences professionnelles ou acquis personnels": validation of studies, work experiences or personal outcomes.

2 The French word used to translate the English “qualification” is “certification”. A large range of qualifications are officially recognised by the State and the social partners. These are diplomas, HE degrees, titles and sectoral certificates delivered by social partners. They are listed and described in a National Qualifications Directory called the ‘Répertoire National des Certifications Professionnelles’ (RNCP).
partners and listed in the national directory of qualifications, RNCP (Répertoire National des Certifications Professionnelles).

A new law introduced in November 2009 stressed the necessity to develop guidance and accompaniment related to VAE.

1.1 **National legal framework, system or policy on validation**

Since 1985, the validation system in France has been based on a legal framework which is regularly updated after consultation and agreement with the social partners. The main changes are generally made to integrate the outcomes of social partners’ negotiations in the field of lifelong learning (LLL). The last change was made in 2009 and concerns the process to increase the number of individuals accessing the VAE process, in particular private sector workers.

Laws from 1984, 1992, 2002 and 2009 are collected in the Labour Code and the Education Code:

- Education code, art. L. 214-12, L. 214-13, L. 335-5 and following, R. 335-5 et R. 361-2 and for HE: art. L. 331-1, L. 613-3 and 613-4 and following, L. 641-2 Decree n° 2002-590 of 24 April dedicated to HE.

The above-mentioned legal texts concern all qualifications registered in the RNCP, the National Qualifications Directory (including all HE awards). Each awarding body corresponding to a ministry has published its own rules, outlining practical issues for the context-specific implementation of the principles outlined in the legislation.

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

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

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

The RNCP and the VAE are interdependent, since a VAE procedure must be available for all qualifications registered in the RNCP except when a qualification is linked to a ‘regulated profession’ (where activity made without the corresponding qualification is illegal).

The RNCP describes the content of qualifications in terms of competences – in particular professional competences – thereby enabling the public (students, employees, employers etc) to understand better the range of qualifications available to them and to make informed educational choices.

Since 2002, a significant investment has been made in the higher education sector in particular (at the level of school education, all vocational training diplomas were already described in terms of learning outcomes), to produce standards (référentiels) described in terms of learning outcomes in order to make VAE available for the evaluation practices.

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3 See: [www.legifrance.gouv.fr](http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr)
1.3 National institutional framework

The general institutional framework for validation of non-formal and informal learning is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Employment, Industry and Finances, which is in charge of lifelong learning. Laws in this field are debated with social partners and Ministries which award qualifications.

Specific rules and practices for the implementation of the process are under the responsibility of each Ministry awarding qualifications. There are as many validation frameworks in place as there are Ministries in charge of awarding qualifications:

- Education
- Higher education
- Agriculture,
- Labour,
- Culture,
- Sports,
- Social affairs
- Health
- Defence

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

The box below presents the division of responsibilities throughout the different steps of the process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps of the VAE process</th>
<th>Level of responsibility</th>
<th>Stakeholders involved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main principles and legal framework</td>
<td>National level</td>
<td>Social partners and the Ministry of Employment (which is currently responsible for LLL in France) through social dialogue followed by the adoption of laws and legal texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of the standards used and validation procedure, quality assurance</td>
<td>National level</td>
<td>Awarding authorities (Ministries) design their own standards and assessment procedure⁴ according to the requirements for organisation and quality criteria, which are defined in official documentation published in the official notices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designation of the assessment centres where the applicants meet the jury</td>
<td>National level</td>
<td>Under the supervision of the regional Council, together with different stakeholders: - regional or local representatives of Ministries providing qualifications (Academie, regional delegation for other ministries) - public employment service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information and guidance</td>
<td>Regional level</td>
<td>- public employment service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local level (firms)</td>
<td>- regional or local representatives of Ministries providing qualifications (Academie, regional delegation for other ministries)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

⁴ Generally evaluations are made on the basis of a “dossier” or a portfolio where the applicant describes his/her experience. Further written evidence of the experience of the applicant is also frequently requested in order to support the evaluation. This “declaration” must include details of skills and competences used in their activities. Further evaluation methods include observations of real or simulated working activities, interviews and presentations.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps of the VAE process</th>
<th>Level of responsibility</th>
<th>Stakeholders involved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Implementation of the validation procedure (collection and examination of the request, organisation of the jury, administrative aspects etc)</td>
<td>National, regional or local level</td>
<td>Representatives or delegates of qualification providers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery of the qualification</td>
<td>National, regional or local level</td>
<td>Representatives of the awarding authorities (after the jury's decision)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow up activities especially when only a part of qualification is obtained through validation</td>
<td>Regional or local level</td>
<td>Information and guidance desks (help applicants to find the way to acquire the skills or competences they need to achieve the full qualification) Firm, when VAE is organised within a firm for its workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection of statistical information</td>
<td>National level</td>
<td>Each Ministry awarding qualifications</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For example, in the case of qualifications awarded under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, standards, procedures and quality insurance criteria are defined nationally by the Ministry. The organisation is delegated to Académies (administrative division of the state education system in France). In total there are 30 offices in charge of VAE in the different académies known as DAVA (Dispositif académique de validation des acquis). They have three main objectives:

- to inform the applicants about the process and the qualifications available,
- to accompany the applicant during the procedure
- to organise the jury sessions.

For some awards with very few applicants, a jury can be set up at a national level under the responsibility of one Académie.

In the case of qualifications awarded by other public or private institutions:

- with various establishments in France: standards and procedures and delivery of the awards are design nationally but the organisation of the procedure for applicants is delegated to the representatives of the central direction at a regional or local level.
- one single establishment: all stages are implemented at the local level.

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

In HE, the credit system for formal learning is implemented through the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). VAE follows this structure for the diplomas or degrees concerned. The European Credit Transfer System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) is not yet implemented in France.

Each qualification is generally divided into modules. Such modules can be considered as units which can be linked to the credit system. However, so far the credit system is more oriented towards accumulation rather than transfer.
1.6 Funding framework

Funding for VAE is included within funding allocated for LLL. In practice, funding may come from different sources, for example in addition to State or regional funding, bipartite bodies such as FONGECIF (Fonds de Gestion des Congés Individuels de Formation – Fund for individual training leave) or OPCA (Organismes paritaires collecteurs agréés, which are sectoral bodies managed by social partners collecting taxes from employers and employees in order to finance and develop training) and employers may also contribute. Validation costs vary depending on the awarding bodies, the status of the applicants and the qualification concerned.

Article 21 of the 2009 Law expanded the opportunities to use funding related to the LLL for VAE especially for workers, through social dialogue at sectoral level and the OPCA.

There are three aspects of the validation process in link with costs:

- **Registration fees.** For university they vary according to the level and type of study and are fixed by the Ministry every year.

- Costs related to the support provided during the validation process (not compulsory but strongly recommended) which vary from around EUR 400-1500

- The assessment process, which is generally around EUR 300.

In the case of qualifications awarded under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education by the DAVA, the process is free of charge for the participant, which only bears costs related to the accompaniment.

Funding provided by the State, or credits for validation are allocated at national level by the Ministry of Employment to its regional structures, which themselves distribute the funding amongst the regional structures of other Ministries that deliver qualifications and other actors such as enterprises or educational institutions. For example, in the Alsace region, VAE ‘vouchers’ have been introduced to support validation applicants who do not benefit from unemployment benefits or support from their employer (from EUR 180 to EUR 600, plus an additional flat-rate of EUR 300 to cover the costs linked to the jury set-up, where applicable\(^5\)). In the Midi-Pyrenees region, the value of vouchers is set at EUR 500 (larger amounts can be awarded on a case-by-case basis depending on the applicant’s needs\(^6\).

Unemployed people can receive (financial) support for VAE from the Public Employment Service (Pôle Emploi). Additional support is provided by the regions which run specific programmes for the unemployed.

Regions also finance information and guidance centres for VAE. Most of them receive funding from the European Social Fund.

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\(^6\) [http://www.aides-entreprises.fr/repertoiredesaides/aides.php?e=MzQxMA==&id_ter=](http://www.aides-entreprises.fr/repertoiredesaides/aides.php?e=MzQxMA==&id_ter=)
### Data on flows of beneficiaries

Data on flows of beneficiaries for the period 2004-2008 is provided in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ministry</th>
<th>Total number of candidate applications</th>
<th>Total number of candidates who were assessed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Higher Education and Research</td>
<td>Data not available</td>
<td>Data not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Agriculture</td>
<td>930</td>
<td>828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Social Affairs and Health</td>
<td>Data not available</td>
<td>25 663</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Employment</td>
<td>5 200</td>
<td>7 363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Youth and Sports</td>
<td>3 480</td>
<td>3 025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Army</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Data not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Culture</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Maritime Affairs</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total of ministries awarding qualifications</td>
<td>Data not available</td>
<td>Between 60 000 and 63 000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: DARES*

NB These statistics only take into account qualifications officially recognised by the State. For the time being, there are no statistics for other certificates (for instance those awarded by chambers of industry or of trade)
ORGANISATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON VALIDATION

Since 2002, the processes and procedures for validating non formal and informal learning outcomes have been set up for almost all the qualifications registered in the RNCP. However, some awarding bodies, especially in the HE sector, still hesitate to apply VAE for various reasons related to funding as well as a cultural reluctance to admit that individuals can learn outside of formal learning provided under their responsibility. This is why the aforementioned law of November 2009 allowed the use of funding earmarked for LLL to support VAE.

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

Since 2002, the entire formal education and training sector has been involved in the development of VAE. It is compulsory for all education providers to develop a VAE process for each awarded qualifications, except in the case of qualifications related to regulated professions.

Ministries awarding qualifications have developed decentralised services/offices for VAE. In the case of the Ministry of Education, this network is structured by Académies (DAVA, see 1.4). Other Ministries have set up these services at regional level (Ministries of Agriculture, of Sport and of Social Affairs) or subregional (département) level, e.g. the Ministry of Employment. Decentralised structures provide:

- general information about VAE and more specific information about the relevant procedure depending on the Ministry concerned;
- advice and guidance to determine which specific qualification best fits the applicant’s experience;
- registration of applicants and decision on the validity of the application;
- set up of the jury;
- follow-up of validation process,
- follow-up activities in case the applicant is only issued part of a qualification, to help him/her complete a full qualification.

Though the same legal principles and rules of the VAE process are applied by all Ministries, they have their own procedures of identification and validation. A common agreement was however established in 2008 between Ministries to use the same registration process for an applicant’s request for validation. This procedure is set out in an official document (CERFA IT 9514527, commonly called the *livret 1*), which states that each awarding body may request additional documentation, according to the field of the qualification8.

VAE is also delivered by 81 universities and other higher education institutions in France.

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

There are various information and guidance offices run by regional/local institutions or stakeholders responsible for specific target groups (the disabled, marginalised groups, migrants etc.), by training funds (e.g. FONGECIF), by Pôle Emploi, by private training centres or those run by chambers of commerce, etc. Most of these structures or institutions have been originally developed to provide guidance to adults relating to LLL and the

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7 http://www.vae.gouv.fr/VOUS_ETES_UN_PARTICULIER/COMMENT_SE_DEROULE_UNE_DEMARCHE/RETRAIT_DU_DOS SIER_RECEVABILITE.htm
8 See example for Ministry of Education http://www.enspro.ac-aix- marseille.fr/dossiers/VAE/LIVRET_N1_VOTRE_DEMANDE.pdf
provision of guidance about VAE has been later integrated in their missions. Generally the same professionals that give advice on LLL are trained to provide advice on VAE as well.

New specific structures have also been set up at the regional level with the mission to provide information about VAE to different information, advice and guidance offices. They are co-funded by the State and regional councils. In terms of guidance, a new service has been implemented at regional level from 2010, the ‘tutor’ for VAE (référent unique de parcours VAE) to accompany individuals throughout the whole VAE process. Indeed, a significant drop-out between the first information step and the end of the validation process has been observed, but experience has shown that when applicants where accompanied by the same person throughout the process, it led to a 70 % higher probability for the applicant both to achieve a qualification and to get a job.

In addition, various websites provide guidance:

- At a national level, a dedicated website (www.VAE.gouv.fr) has been set up in 2008, translated into English and Spanish. Information can be found concerning legal texts, links to the websites of the main stakeholders and practical aspects about the procedures, contact of guidance and advice services etc.

- The main public information and guidance services have a similar website.

- Regional websites have been developed, often in common with another regional institution related to providing information on training available in the region (Centres d'animation et de ressources regionaux pour l'information sur la formation - CARIF).

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

Initiatives mentioned in the previous European Inventory report for France⁹ were pursued through agreements between firms and some awarding Ministries, but also through the agreement on processes related to their own qualifications. Two types of private actors can be involved in validation:

- Sectoral actors (firms, sectoral organisations) can develop sectoral qualifications. These qualifications are designed and delivered by social partners and are known as Certificats de qualification professionnelle (CQP). Currently the majority of the CQP are designed with a double evaluation process, including both assessment of the learning achieved via training and a second assessment of experience gained in the work place. There is another approach combining VAE and training.

- Private training centres, training centres of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (CCI) or Trade Chambers. CCI have developed a specific process aimed towards awarding ‘competence certificates in business’ (certificats de compétences en entreprise, CCE). These qualifications involve a workplace evaluation.

Qualifications designed by these stakeholders (except CCE) can be integrated in the RNCP after an accreditation process from a National Commission (CNCP, Commission Nationale de la Certification Professionnelle). The same rules and legal principles apply for these qualifications regarding VAE.

Other types of qualification related to ‘regulated activities’ or to short (vocational) training courses are generally not registered in the RNCP and not concerned by VAE.

Pôle Emploi, the national public employment service, has reached agreements with certain sectoral organisation to focus VAE-related support to the unemployed in sectors where there are specific labour shortages, for instance:

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• In the tourism sector, an agreement has been reached with the hotel industry (represented by ADEFIH\textsuperscript{10}) and the OPCA for the sector (FAFIH). In 2008 and 2009, the agreement concerned 1,553 and 1,645 applicants (80% of these succeeded and obtained a vocational qualification certificate delivered by the Hotel industry branch, among these 10 % obtained their qualification via VAE ). A specific support for VAE was developed by Pôle emploi and the sector at a regional level.

In the social sector, between 2002 and 2008, 132,966 persons applied to VAE. Of these, 64,166 were assessed by a jury but only 27,587 succeeded and obtained a qualification. The process was free of charge for jobseekers (except the accompaniment phase) and financed by Pôle Emploi, regional funding and the OPCA in the sector of health and social services.

In the Île de France region, an agreement has been signed with the State, the region of Île-de-France and social partners on employment and vocational training to address the effects of the economic downturn, which covers in particular the use of VAE.

Today, many firms have recognised the value of VAE for their employees. The Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Enterprise have developed framework agreements (accords cadres) with enterprises or the OPCA in order to set up a collective VAE service for employees who want to get vocational qualifications\textsuperscript{11}. Such agreements cover the provision of support for applicants, e.g. funding or counsellors helping applicants to produce their validation portfolio.

Two examples of private sector firms which have developed validation procedures for their employees are described in the boxes below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orange: Using validation for career development and skills forecasting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The mobile phone company Orange introduced a validation initiative in 2007 in 3 regions (Nord-Pas de Calais, Champagne-Ardenne and Picardie), in order to recognise the skills of its workers in the context of the changing competence needs of the telecommunications sector. The aim is to enhance career development and internal mobility. The initiative applies to both those who have been working in the sector for a long period and newly recruited workers with qualifications equivalent to level five of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The Human Resources Manager at Orange worked together with AFPA (Association pour la Formation Professionnelle des Adultes – National association for vocational training of adults) to identify the appropriate qualification for applicants. The process of validation included a guidance phase of 20 hours, followed by an on-the-job assessment in the employees’ place of work. 50 technicians within the company were informed of the programme and 24 volunteered to take part in it. To date, 15 of the 24 participants have achieved a qualification through validation and 2 have obtained a partial qualification. After completion of this pilot project, Orange has been using VAE as a tool to forecast skills needs within the organisation in France.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\textsuperscript{11} Agreements have been signed for example with Club Méditerranée, EDF, Danone, France Telecom or L’Oreal.
The 150-years-old firm SEB is specialised in small electronic equipment for the home. A significant process of re-structuring, in particular in central France (Mayenne) obliged the Human resources manager to identify a new way of managing the changing roles of the firm’s workers. The project was implemented in 2008 after seven months of preparation.

Two phases were implemented;
- Developing multiple competences for the lowest qualified employees
- Reinforcing the workers’ employability by the acquisition of new skills required by the firm

In order to reach this goal four tools were used:
- A description of each existing job in the firm
- The design of an evolution plan to enable each worker to acquire new skills
- An annual evaluation interview
- An annual professional interview to plan new developments.

Close to 400 workers were involved in the project. The main stakeholders involved were those related to the public employment service.

One of the tools chosen was VAE, in order to enable workers to acquire a qualification in industrial manufacturing). 19 workers agreed to enter in the process and 16 succeeded. The assessment methodology was on-the-job examination.

SEB is now using this approach in other parts of the firm.

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

For this sector, the rules and principles applied to VAE are exactly the same as for other sectors. Nevertheless, specific actions have been designed to facilitate the identification of volunteers’ competences and help them to valorise their learning outcomes.

As an example, the Olympic Committee has implemented a tool originally named “carnet de vie” which has already been used by 1800 applicants involved in sports activity. It provides guidance in the choice of a qualification available through VAE or to apply for a competence assessment (bilan de compétences).

Another initiative is the passport for volunteers (Passeport Bénévole) launched in September 2007 with similar objectives but in the filed of social care. It is supported by most awarding ministries with a VAE process and is used by many charity associations (e.g. la Croix Rouge, Association des Paralysés de France, Secours Populaire, Secours Catholique, les Blouses Roses, etc).

A recent report on volunteering in Europe identified a number of projects in France exploring how to best record the competences of volunteers. The Ministry with responsibility for volunteering is considering tools such as portfolios which could be recognised by companies. In addition, in 2009 the government announced the launch of a competence portfolio (Livret de compétences) for secondary school pupils to highlight the competences they ac-

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12 This section refers to (non-paid) voluntary work carried out by bénévoles, different from the activities of volontaires. The latter relate to voluntary service (paid work) under the responsibility of the Ministry of the Foreign Affairs, which is a specific status in France related to specific employment rules.
quire outside school, including voluntary activities. The tool is undergoing trials in 2010 in a limited number of schools (see below). 

Identification of non-formal and informal learning of young people: the **livret expérimental de compétences**

This pilot project to continue until 2012 was announced in December 2009 as part of the law on lifelong learning and guidance of 24 November of that year. It will allow young people in primary school and secondary school to document their personal skills and competences acquired in the framework of non-formal and informal learning.

This document is a complement to the **livret personnel de compétences** which documents the school results and the **passeport orientation-formation**.

The difference between the **Livret Expérimental** and the **Livret Personnel de compétences** is that the former brings together the full range of competences of the young person, which may have been acquired via formal education or outside of formal education and training, for example through voluntary activities, activities at home, work and other types of training. In contrast to the **livret personnel**, which is completed by the teacher, the **livret experimental** is completed by the young person.

The purpose of this new tool is to encourage independence of young people, to help them find a career orientation and to develop a spirit of self-assessment. This tool has been developed at primary and secondary level and will now be implemented in the rest of the education sector.

Further information can be found at the following link: [http://www.education.gouv.fr/cid50137/mene0901112c.html](http://www.education.gouv.fr/cid50137/mene0901112c.html)

2.5 Costs to organisations

Two kinds of costs to organisations can be distinguished:

- Costs related to the design of the standards used for validation (**référentiels de certification**)
- Costs related to the VAE procedure itself

Such costs are difficult to evaluate concerning the specific process of validation because they also exist for formal learning. In France jury members are not paid but receive only some fees, which can be costly for some organisations. The 2009 Law (Article 20) specified that workers’ time dedicated to participating in such a jury (wages, expenditure for travel, meals and hotels) can be paid by the OPCA.

Employers contribute to the cost of VAE of their employees when it is part of their individual training plan, through the contribution they pay to OPCA.

3 INDIVIDUAL PERSPECTIVE

An individual right to benefit from VAE has been granted since 2002. Progress has been made to allow a maximum of individuals to access their right to validation, through specific measures according to their status or situation. Currently, a significant investment is being made by private firms to enable more workers to use VAE, for example via time allowance and the provision of group support by the firm or the awarding body (see examples mentioned in 2.3).
3.1 Awareness-raising

As noted earlier in section 1.2, since 2002 dissemination of information to individuals about VAE has been provided through various channels. Special efforts are made at sectoral level via the role of OPCA, the sectoral organisation collecting funding for LLL.

3.2 Provision of guidance and support

Since 2002, a network of offices to provide information about VAE has been established. Some of these offices were already in charge of information provision about LLL, for example the CIO-Centres d'information et d'orientation focused on initial training in schools and HE centres, Centres de bilan de compétences for job seekers, etc.

The network is currently called Points d'Information Conseil (PIC)\(^{16}\) and is managed at a regional level. Such structures provide initial information about the process and the different responsible awarding bodies. The choice of the qualification required for each applicant is decided together with the awarding body.

The 2009 Law stressed the importance of information and guidance in the process of validating non-formal and informal learning outcomes and set a target to ensure a right to guidance for every worker, so they can move up to a qualification one level higher over the course of their working life.

Information about VAE can be perceived as complex as there are various authorities awarding qualifications (each of them following a specific procedure) and no single body that covers all aspects of the process. This situation was often considered to be a barrier to the further development of VAE. Different approaches to address this issue can be highlighted:

- Activities of specialised professionals giving information on the relationship between the business environment and the awarded qualification;
- integrating the promotion of VAE within tasks of counsellors or guidance professionals generally in charge of adult guidance;
- production of information material (e.g. booklets and fliers)
- websites designed to inform the public about VAE by professional organisations and regional and local stakeholders, as well as the national governmental website www.vae.gouv.fr

Most practitioners use the RNCP certificate supplement as a source for guidance because each registered qualification is described in terms of learning outcomes and professional activities.

In addition, some awarding bodies such as universities and high schools cover the entire process from provision of information to assessment.

3.3 Costs to individuals

Since 2002, the time spent by applicants in relation to VAE has been paid for through LLL funding. A decree in December 2002 introduced the right for workers to a 24 hours paid leave to undertake a validation process. The fees to register in a VAE procedure can vary from EUR 0 to 1,000 depending on the qualification concerned. Accompaniment during the procedure and registration fees can be covered by different external sources of funding, according to the status of the individual. (See section 1.6).

\(^{16}\) See http://www.vae.gouv.fr/VOUS_ETES_UN_PARTICULIER/COMMENT_SE_DEROULE_UNE_DEMARCHE/INFORMATION_CONSEIL_ORIENTATION.htm
3.4 Initiatives focused on specific target groups

Specific initiatives are carried out, for example, to help job-seekers, the disabled, civil servants, prisoners who want to benefit from VAE, via specific guidance or funding.

For example, as mentioned above a pilot project launched in December 2009 focuses on identification of non-formal and informal learning of young people through a portfolio “livret de compétences” (see section 2.4).

In November 2009 another tool, named training and orientation passport (passeport orientation formation) was introduced, which is particularly useful for older workers (see the box below).

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Valorisation of LLL: the ‘passeport orientation formation’

The ‘passeport orientation formation’ was introduced as part of the law of November 2009. It has been designed according to Article 2 of the European Parliament decision n°2241/2004/CE and the European Council decision of the 15 December 2004 on Europass. At the time of writing, a decree was awaited for its actual implementation.

The tool will concern learning outcomes acquired through formal education (the Ministry of Education has already prepared a format for its implementation linked to the “livret de competences”) as well as information collected relating to working life through the “bilan d’étape professionnel” especially for workers aged over 45.

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Regarding the access to VAE of unemployed people, an example is the taken by the Public Employment Service Pôle Emploi (see box below).

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Pôle Emploi: Supporting the Unemployed to Access Validation

Pôle Emploi can provide assistance to jobseekers to cover the whole or a part of:

- Registration fees for a VAE process
- Costs associated with the accompaniment and guidance in linked with the preparation of a portfolio, travel and subsistence expenses,
- Costs related to the organisation of the jury.

The contribution from Pôle Emploi can go up to EUR 640 and be combined with other sources of support (e.g. regional funding).

3.5 Evidence of benefits to individuals

Validation allows an individual to identify and gain recognition for his / her knowledge, skills and competencies acquired through professional and personal experiences.

Benefits are linked to the acquisition of a recognised qualification, and therefore it is very important to devote time at the beginning of the validation process to select the qualification most in relation with the professional or personal project of the applicants. In the case of workers who apply to VAE, this may be negotiated with the employer.

Achieving a qualification through VAE brings personal benefits to individuals, such as improving their personal profile, capacities and self-confidence. It motivates individuals for further studies or training.

VAE improves the employability of individuals and may also help the individual in his / her job and/or future career development, as it helps to facilitate internal or external mobility, etc.

VAE is also seen as an opportunity to save time and money compared to the cost and duration linked to the acquisition of the same qualification within formal education (including when the applicant only gets validation for in some units of the qualification). Partial validation is valid for a further five years (except in HE where it is unlimited). In case of partial recognition, individuals can obtain a full qualification, by completing further education or training, or undergoing further (work) experience in order to acquire the missing skills.
4 QUALITY ASSURANCE AND EVALUATION

In the field of validation, it is not common to find to have quality assurance related to standards provided through CEN or ISO. The main principles are provided by national legal texts and practical rules are provided by each awarding body. They concern the quality of standards used for validation and quality of professionals involved in the different stages of the process.

4.1 Quality Assurance Framework

The Quality Assurance framework defined by the legal text for all qualification concerns:

- the registration of the qualification in the RNCP,
- the standards (to be developed with professional practitioners)
- the composition of the jury,
- the result of the validation process.

4.2 Quality assurance systems / procedures

Quality assurance systems / procedures are under the responsibility by each awarding body regarding the organisation of the procedure and the characteristics of practitioners involved.

Each awarding Ministry has a specific service devoted to following the process and procedures in order to improve their rules. Since 2002, awarding bodies have improved their practices through the evaluation of past experiences.\(^\text{17}\) Most of the Ministries have carried out evaluations enabling them to develop new approaches for the benefit of both applicants and juries. It seems that such evaluation practices can even influence the rules in place for the organisation of assessments in formal education and training, as members of the jury modify their approaches to pedagogy and the ways in which they apply the criteria defined in the referentiels.

Providing support to applicants is a crucial step in the validation process. Various support centres have been set up to help applicants to prepare their portfolio and collect evidence of their non-formal and informal learning. Awarding authorities do not regulate the activities of these structures unless they finance their action.

However a “quality charter” was developed by the State and VAE stakeholders in 2008 in order to outline a set of key principles for the provision of support to validation candidates\(^\text{18}\). The charter describes the function of support within the validation process and how stakeholders involved should interact. Several regions, universities and professional federations have signed an agreement with the support centres to ensure they offer a minimum guarantee of quality.

4.3 Evaluation framework

From 2005 until 2008, there has been a national committee\(^\text{19}\) in charge of the development of VAE. Its main task was to harmonise processes and procedures between providers. Currently evaluation is provided through statistical monitoring. This is supported by the ministry in charge of LLL, currently the Ministry of Employment.

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\(^{17}\) See CEREQ Bref n° 224 et 230 and Study driven by Bernard Prot CNAM – INETOP in 2005 http://www.alfacentre.org/vae/pdf/actes_colloque_vae_05_07_01.pdf

\(^{18}\) http://www.vae.gouv.fr/_pdf/CHARTE_ACOMPAGNEMENT_VAE_GROUPE.PDF

\(^{19}\) Circulaire DGEFP no 2007-24 du 4 octobre 2007 relative à l’organisation territoriale des certificateurs pour la validation des acquis de l’expérience
The Committee undertook a number of different initiatives, including the development of a guide about VAE describing the different practices set up by the main awarding bodies. The Committee set up different working groups to reflect on the functioning of VAE and consider improvements that could be made. There were for example a working group to develop VAE for civil servants, a group to develop a quality charter, a group to improve the standard of information about VAE and a group to develop a common tool for the registration of applicants.

5 ASSESSMENT METHODS

According to the legal framework, assessment is made mainly through the examination of the individual portfolio (dossier) of the applicant combining different types of evidence. The content of the portfolio can change according to the nature of the learning outcomes to be assessed.

5.1 Methods used

Methods used are related to the type of learning outcomes to be assessed and include:

- A written description of the applicant's experience, with precise details on the knowledge, know-how, attitudes, procedures, methodologies, tools etc. used for their activities (declarative methods)
- Observation of real or simulated working activities (practical examination)
- Interviews and presentations with assessors
- Evidence of past professional achievements (e.g. press book, ICT production, etc.)
- A case study or a research
- Tests, etc

- An interview with the jury is not compulsory but is used for most of the procedures.

As noted above, a common format for the registration of applicants in the VAE process has been developed (livret 1). The portfolio collecting evidence is called livret 2 and can vary in content according to the awarding bodies.

5.2 Advantages and disadvantages of the methods used

Optimal methods of assessment are considered as a combination of the above-presented methods, allowing the verification of learning outcomes in different ways.

There are disadvantages associated with the use of portfolio due to the amount of time needed for the applicant to collect evidence as well as for validation practitioners, implying costs. Each applicant needs time to describe skills and competences gained through non-formal and informal methods, and identify them against a standard reference.

Other methods such as observation in the workplace or interviews which require the presence of validation practitioners in addition to the VAE jury include additional costs.

6 VALIDATION PRACTITIONERS

Validation practitioners are technicians and professionals in the field of LLL and representatives of employers or employees from fields related to the activities targeted by the qualification concerned by the process.

21 Examples from the Ministry of Education can be found at: http://www.livret2vae.fr/.
6.1 Profile of validation practitioners
Throughout the VAE process, tasks are carried out by specialised professionals with relevant qualifications.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main steps of the process</th>
<th>Practitioners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information, advice, guidance</td>
<td>Guidance professionals (counsellors used to give guidance for LLL and/or employment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receipt of the request for validation administrative check of the duration of the experience of the applicant and relevance to the requested qualification</td>
<td>Depend on the type of validation: administrative staff, or for HE teachers or trainers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support to the applicant in collecting evidence for the portfolio</td>
<td>A large range of practitioners generally related to public or private institutions involved in counselling and guidance for employment and LLL.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of the content of the portfolio</td>
<td>A jury composed of at least 25% of members who are professionals. In HE the jury is composed of both professionals and teachers (the latter represent a majority of the jury).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation methods</td>
<td>Trainers or professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow up after validation in the case the applicant is given a partial qualification</td>
<td>The same practitioners as in the two first steps</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many stakeholders involved in VAE may have a similar profile to professionals delivering *bilan de compétences* or competence check (a guidance tool used to provide advice relating to training, proposals for a new career/career development, and in some cases suggestions to explore the opportunity of validation of non formal and informal learning), especially during the information step or the completion of the portfolio.

The provision for guidance related to VAE requires professionals with the skills to undertake interviews and knowledge of the working environment.

6.2 Provision of training and support to practitioners
Awarding bodies provide training to the jury members, under the form of one to three days workshops and practice exchanges on the learning outcomes to be assessed and skills relating to the evaluation of non formal and informal learning. Other practitioners receive information and training from regional structures for VAE.

As noted above, since 2002 generally the same professionals providing guidance on LLL have been trained to provide advice on VAE.

6.3 Qualifications requirements
Requirements relating to the profile of the jury members depend on the subject field of the qualification: jury members must be involved in relevant training or work. Teachers and trainers involved in a jury should not have any link with the applicant.
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**Stakeholders consulted:**
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CNAM
Ministries of Education, Agriculture, Employment, Youth and sports, Social Affairs, Defence, University of Lille, VAE Universities network